THE RITUAL OF *GCOD* IN TIBETAN RELIGION

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ABSTRACT

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In order to understand Tibetan religion, this project isolates the ritual of *gcod* as a pillar of Tibetan cultural ingenuity for three main reasons. First, *gcod* developed during a critical period of cultural development in Tibet (tenth-thirteenth centuries); it epitomizes a renaissance formation of high culture. Second, studying *gcod* reveals the variety of soteriological, cosmological, and ritual influences that lead to a definitive Tibetan religion. Finally, the study of *gcod* yields important insights into the Tibetan religious economy that is the stage on which ritual and soteriological competition play out. While keeping these broader concerns in mind, *gcod* will be discussed in four chapters. In the first, the historical and cosmological contexts for *gcod* are discussed. In the second chapter, *gcod*'s fit into Buddhist soteriology will be described and affirmed. Third, the role of *gcod* in Tibetan local religion will be discussed along with descriptions of the *gcod pa's* professional competitors. Finally, the *gcod* ritual proper will be described in as much detail as possible. In addition, both the introduction and the conclusion discuss possible avenues for *gcod* in ritual discourse (within religious studies). With these investigations in mind, this project will proceed to argue that the heart of all these innovations and syntheses is their this-worldly focus, which is generally true for Tibetan religion. The reason why *gcod* perpetuated is because it was instrumental in solving mundane problems, not because of the profundity of its doctrinal content.

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FORWARD

This project is a beginning in my work of looking at Tibetan ritual and demonology. I have relied heavily on the scholarship of reputable and credible writers who have looked with expertise at primary sources for information on Tibetan religion. These accounts are of three main types: ethnographic, historical, and textual. I am more interested in establishing what can be known from Western scholarship before doing serious work in the fields of ritual and anthrophological studies as they pertain to Tibet.

The structure of the *gcod* rite described here is found in two Tibetan texts called the *Phung po zan bskyur gzi rnam bshad* and *Phung po gzan skyur gyi rnam bshad gcod kyi don gsal byed,* which I have looked at in the original Tibetan for this project. These texts fit into a larger genre of Tibetan ritual literature; they contain hagiographical elements, verse and stories, which serve as the necessary backdrop for the transmission of ritual instructions. Belonging to a group of texts that are said to be personally transmitted instructions by Ma cgig Lab sgron; these contain prototypical guidelines about how to conduct *gcod* which can be found in the various forms of the rite transmitted over more than eight-hundred years. Fortunately, these texts have been entirely translated by Professor Sarah Harding at Naropa University and discussed within the dissertation of Carol Savvas of New York University. Using these translations as a basis, the basic rite of *gcod* will be discussed while incorporating as many technical terms and concepts from the original texts as possible.

Tibetan is transliterated in this project using Wylie format. The first letter in the transliteration is capitalized when denoting a person or place and at the beginning of a sentence. Because my research on *gcod* is a continuing project, I wanted to transliterate using a simple system where the Tibetan spelling of the terms is as apparent as possible. Terms in Sanskrit are rendered simply with no diacritical marks nor are there additional consonants in lieu of them. In addition, when a term is more prevalently rendered in Sanskrit transliteration in the secondary scholarship, it is left in Sanskrit. With reference to Chinese terms, they are presented in the pinyin transliteration format

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The tradition of *bdud kyi gcod yul* (translated: “The demon as the object to be severed”) has fascinated westerners since Tibetan religion began to be studied in the West. The theosophist W.Y. Evans Wentz (1967, 315), in his rendering of the *gcod* ritual, provides the following description of the rite:

> Be ye sangsaric or non-sangsaric. ye Eight Orders of Spirits, ye elementals and non-human being, and ye mischievous and malignant hosts of flesh-eating sprites who would mislead [the devotee], on the outspread human-hide, covering all the World Systems, heaped up flesh, blood, and bones have been laid out as a [sacrificial] offering. If I consider these to be ‘mine’ or as being ‘I,’ I will hereby manifest weakness. Ungrateful would ye all be should ye not enjoy the offering most heartily. If ye be in haste, bolt it down uncooked; if ye have leisure, cook and eat it, piece by piece; and leave not a bit the size of an atom behind.

Although Wentz’s theosophist agenda was less than scholarly (he believed that Tibetan culture had Aryan origins), his rather naive reading into Tibetan culture rings of innocent accuracy: *gcod* is a Tibetan form of religious praxis that is more akin to sorcery than orthodox Buddhism. The gist of *gcod* ritual is the administration of a feast composed of the presiding ritualist’s corpse, which is fashioned through a series of tantric and shamanic manipulations to be fit for demonic consumption. This is done in order to convince malevolent beings to desist in harming humans and become perpetuators of *chos* (Skt. *dharma*).

At the heart of Tibetan religious culture is a conception of the world as being adversarial and populated by malevolent beings and forces. Tibetan mythological narratives retell how Tibet was civilized by the pacification of powerful demons that

then became the protective gods of the country. However, though tamed, Tibet's environment remained turbulent and demonic threats were seen as manifested in sickness, disease, madness, weather, misfortune, and death, but were addressed and pacified in different ways as ritual developed and changed. The ritual of *gcod* exemplifies Tibetan religion because it answers a host of demonic threats in a complex culmination of tantric, esoteric, and classic Buddhist ritual technology and local forms of ritual mediation. Therefore, this project will describe these ritual components of *gcod*, demonstrating the uniqueness of Tibetan culture and furthering the study of Tibetan religion in general.

As opposed to a discussion of *gcod's* underlying doctrine, philosophy, and hagiography, the purpose here will be to describe the historical precedents and means of propagation, the cosmology behind the ritual, the people who practice the ritual and where, and, finally, the ritual itself understood within a Tibetan context. The next chapter discusses the history and cosmology of *gcod* up until the time of its articulation in the major schools of Tibetan Buddhism. The third chapter discusses the unique shape Buddhism took in Tibet that privileged doctrine and ritual concerning the appropriation of the demonic and wrathful inhabitants of the cosmos. Next, chapter four discusses the relationship between *gcod,* demons and the Tibetan people within a religious economy wherein ritual services are high in demand. In the fifth chapter, a typical *gcod* rite will be described in as much detail as can be provided, which includes further classifications of demons within the ritual system. Finally, the conclusion of this project will discuss the implications of *gcod* for ritual and religious studies.

Renaissance and Matriarchy in Tibet

Ma gcig Lab sgron was the eleventh century matriarch of *gcod*, who became the presiding deity within the tradition she developed. Texts within the Tibetan genre of ritual literature contain hagiographical elements and, consequently, included within the primary text used for the explication of *gcod* here, are a plethora of statements concerning her transmundane prowess. For example, when she was meditating in a cave at the age of forty-one years, the *Phung po gzan skyur gyi rnam gcod kyi don gsal byed* (*The Method to Sever the Object, which Transforms the Aggregates*) states that she encountered Tara, who told her:

> Yogini, I empower you as the great proprietor and chief of three mantras: secret, *dharani*, and knowledge mantras. Abiding as the principal one of the *mandalas* you are Vajradakini, the blue-black secret *dakini* of the *vajra* family. You are the Great Timeless Wisdom, Vajra Tamer of devils, and the Queen of Vajra Space who controls all the *dakinis* (Harding 2003, 89).

Hence, within *gcod* ritual, Ma gcig is not addressed as a historical founder, but as a *dakini* herself, who is the center of a *mandala*. This *mandala* of *dakinis,* as explained in chapter two, became the means by which the practice of *gcod* maintained its legitimacy within the broader sphere of Tibetan religion; in essence, the identification with Ma gcig, whose empirical history is summarized in chapter one, can be considered to be the ultimate goal of the practice. However, the complexity of *gcod* cannot be essentialized in such a fashion as the ritual itself achieved legitimacy elsewhere as a means to solve a host of this-worldly problems. I suggest that characterizing *gcod* as an *anuttarayoga* of the *yoginitantra* type is only partly explanative of the diffusion of the practice because of the pre-existing Tibetan ritual

matrix. The composite nature of *gcod*, thus, is indicative of a Tibetan renaissance that birthed new and unique forms of ritual, which came to place Tibetan culture on a level on par with the giants of world civilization (e.g. India and China).

The period of time when *gcod* was invented has been called to attention by Ronald Davidson as a Tibetan renaissance era:

> Making a painful transition from the fragmentation and fall of the royal dynasty, the coalescence of culture in the late tenth to the thirteenth century was facilitated by the doctrines, rituals, and practices of Buddhism, primarily later esoteric Buddhism. Tibet's proximity to India and Tarim Basin served as catalyst to the rebirth, and Tibetan scholar, sometimes as the cost of their lives, traveled to Nepal and India in search of the true Buddhism...They brought back not only books but also the literate culture of Indian monasteries, retreat sites, and study centers and used the new esoteric system to assist the renewal of Tibetan civilization (Davidson 2005, 21).

However, Davidson pays little attention to the indigenous Tibetan religious matrix, which is addressed in chapters two through three here. The assertion in these sections is that essential to the renaissance redefinition of Tibetan culture was a worldview, soteriology, and cosmology which transformed the types of rituals being imported from India. As has been eloquently asserted by the constructivists, "beliefs shape experience, just as experience shapes belief," which means that the Tibetans necessarily experienced and integrated outside culture through the lens of their indigenous worldview and beliefs (Katz 1978, 30). In *mi chos* (popular religion) one finds that Tibetan religion addresses uniquely Tibetan concerns. Tibetans throughout their history preceding the renaissance were fixated on an animated landscape that was densely populated by sentient beings, the most prevalent and influential being malevolent demons. These demons needed to be addressed in order to maintain the harmony of society, family, agriculture, weather, and health. These are the primary

problems that *gcod* addresses and, by means of its ritual process, demonological threats are reversed so that beings that were once malevolent become guardians and protectors that are guarantors of tranquility in a hostile and fear provoking environment. Therefore, this work deviates from Davidson's (2005) assertions by establishing popular religion as *a priori* in the discussion of how renaissance practices like *gcod* perpetuated themselves, both culturally and economically, in premodern Tibet.

Investigating gcod in Academic Ritual Studies

Although this study of *gcod* will not explicitly explore ritual theory, the exegetical focus is *gcod* ritual, which implicates the field of ritual studies. Ronald Grimes calls for hermeneutic methodology in ritual discourse and articulates the inherency of the field: “ritual is the hardest religious phenomenon to capture in texts or comprehend by thinking, therefore we need to encounter it concretely, directly, and in the field, or the study of religion suffers” (Grimes 1995, 5). Grimes continues to problematize the status quo in humanities by arguing that the study of actual people is missing. Religious studies itself lacks a proper methodology to explicitly study ritual in the field and anthropological research is the current domain for this area of inquiry. As a result, there is momentous potential to expand the scope of the religious studies to its theoretical and exegetical application in ethnographic research.

As for the semantics of ritual, Catherine Bell defines it broadly as “a type of critical juncture wherein some pair of opposing social or cultural forces comes together” (Bell 1992, 16). Broadly, *gcod* ritual achieves this juncture by imposing

order onto a ‘demonic’ world, which without intervention is chaotic and uncontrollable; specifically, the *gcod pa* imposes the Buddhist order on the non-Buddhiscized cosmos as means to solve for this-worldly demonic interference. Grimes describes this type of ritual as magic. “The word refers to any element of ritual understood as means to an end. If a rite not only has meaning but also works, it is magical. Insofar as it is a deed having transcendent reference and accomplishing some desired empirical result, as rite is magical” (Grimes 1995, 48-49). Because *gcod* is primarily instrumental, the rite has broader implications within the discussion of how it became institutionalized in Tibet and the manner of its popular diffusion.

The Tibetan *gcod pa*, thus, becomes in important figure in the discussion of *gcod*. This means that he or she must have been both socially authoritative and professionally legitimate. Bell argues that a ‘ritual social body,’ which Grimes argues is intrinsic to the development of religion, is created through the diffusion of the ‘sense of ritual’ (Bell 1992, 107). The process of ritualization in societies, thus, is inseparable from the advent of ‘ritual mastery,’ which

> implies that ritual can exist only in the specific cultural schemes and strategies for ritualization (i.e. for the production of ritualized practices) embodied and accepted by persons of specific cultural communities” and “ritual mastery also indicates something of the ‘work’ of ritualization, specifically, the production of a ritualized social agent in whose body lies the schemes by which to shift the organization or significance of many other culturally possible situations (Bell 1992, 107-108).

Therefore, one possible explanation for the development of *gcod* is the creation of Tibetan professional *gcod pas*, who because they are ritualized, can elaborate on the ritual domain. This is one reason why the *gcod* rite described in this project has several distinct ritual and cultural components that are means to accomplish specific

ends, but invoke a wider cosmology and soteriology.

Ritual mastery can be further understood in terms of the development of ritual profession and specialization. Bell (1992, 134) describes how a ritual specialist's "authority rests on the intrinsic importance of ritual as a means of mediating the relations between humans and nonhuman powers. Yet correct performance of the ritual tends to be critical to its efficacy. An emphasis on the correctness of performance promotes and maintains expertise." As a result of *gcod's* ends, the *gcod pa* as Bell's 'specialist' maintains legitimacy by way of the results of the ritual, which are not separate from the performance of the rite. As Grimes notes, as a mode of ritual, magic perpetuates itself due to its instrumentality, which I argue is the key to understanding Tibetan renaissance religion. This implicates the very manner by which Tibetan religion developed throughout the premodern period; ritual mastery and specialization form the basis for ritual institutions:

> Face to face relations among people give way to indirect relations by institutions in addition to concomitant changes in the nature of power and the way it is exercised. The development of a body of specialized agents who possess or control important mechanisms of objectification, such as ritual…is the development of control that can be more total because it is more indirect and invisible (Bell 1992, 131).

This means that the study of Tibetan ritual will yield an understanding of the manner by which Tibetan society developed during the premodern period. Therefore, this project applies Bell's theoretical premises to discuss the institutionalization of *gcod*, which implicates the Renaissance Period as a critical point in Tibet's cultural development.

CHAPTER II

The Inherency of *gcod* During the Tibetan Renaissance

This chapter addresses the historical and cultural seeds that lead to the germination of *gcod*. Implicit in this discussion is an exploration of what constituted Tibet's 'second conversion' or what Ronald Davidson (2005) refers to as the Tibetan Renaissance Period. Starting in the tenth century, Tibet began to redefine their cultural identity by means of integrating the latter Buddhist developments of esotericism and Tantra in India and a reinvigoration of Tibetan indigenous forms of Buddhist soteriology and local religion. With the coalescence of these elements, the ritual praxis of *gcod* and the *gcod pa* ritualist were able to prosper and triumph within the Tibetan clerical and local religious landscape.

Further discussions of *gcod's* cultural context describe a unique Tibetan cosmos where a grand Mahayana Buddhist *dkyil 'khor* (*Skt. mandala*) is primarily seen as the backdrop for vast amounts of otherworldly activity that has immediate consequences. Another discussion will show how this cosmology became a historical pivot by which the Tibetans narrate their conversion history. In addition, as derived from cosmology, the Tibetan conversion mythos will be argued as being a source of legitimacy for the religious professionals. The final discussion implicates the *gcod* ritual eschatology, the typical three period model of Buddhist history, as perpetuating the legitimacy gained by mythological conversion narratives, which diffused Buddhist religious professionals throughout Tibet.

The Inhabited Cosmos and the Need for Intermediaries

The classic Buddhist universe populated by the six types of beings mapped on to a Mahayana *mandala* cannot exclusively account for the cosmology essential to *gcod*. There are two main cosmological themes that the *gcod* ritual assumes and that are unique to the Tibetans themselves. The first theme is a worldview encompassing dozens of types of beings with myriad subtypes populating the immediate world. "A common Tibetan expression for the universe is *snod bcud*, literally 'container-contents.' The world is seen as a vessel within which living beings (*sems can*) of various kinds are contained. The two, container and contents, are not really separable" (Samuel 1993, 159). This means that humans are surrounded by an array of invisible creatures that "are not necessarily favorably inclined towards human beings" (Samuel 1993, 161). According to Samuel, the most prevalent scheme for demonic classification is from *rnying ma* texts describing the Eight Classes (Samuel 1993, 161):

Eight Classes or Wordly Gods & Spirits (*lha srin sde brgyad*)

Name	Description
rgyal po	Spirits of evil kings and lamas; important local gods
ma mo	Fierce black goddesses personifiying nature
bdud	Openly malevolent demons in opposition with the dharma
bstan	Rock dwelling spirits; lamas who rejected vows; protectors
klu	Aquatic spirits; defensive of environment (associated with leprosy)
lha	Benevolent deities that assist humans
gnod	
sbyin	Guardian of natural resources,precious metals
sa	Malevolent planetary deities causing illness; associated with epilepsy
gnyan	Tree spirits defensive; of environment (associated with cancer)
sa bdag	Soil/Ground spirits; defensive of environement[1]

[1] Samuel (1993, 162) gives this typology; he asserts that the extra two classes are commonly included with the normal eight

However, "Buddhist theology necessarily intruded upon the realms of theological debate. In the course of time it was decided to consider as 'gods of the everyday world' those governed in only a vague and fitful way by the thought of enlightenment" (Tucci 1988, 164). It is universal in Buddhism that these spirits and local deities are assumed to be under the universal soteriological laws where the possibility for enlightenment exists. As a result, because the world is populated and influenced by an array of 'invisible beings,' the most efficacious way to bring about fortune and prosperity is to initiate their conversion. On the other hand, to do the opposite and anger them brings about misfortune. "They possess supernatural powers, they are capable of working miracle but not without restriction, nor exclusively in the service of salvation; if they are offended in some manner or are discontented, their violent nature wins the upper hand" (Tucci 1988, 164). Thus, the behavior of these beings can be modeled in terms of a valence between malevolence and benevolence, the direction of which is dependent on their interactions with humans in a mutual world of immanency.

The second cosmological and contextual theme in Tibet's conversion to Buddhism is the close proximity of humans to spirits.

> Having caused offense to the gods is thought of as a kind of pollution, *drib*. *Drib* is the prime cause of misfortune in everyday life, and has to be remedied by appropriate ritual action to the gods…Some kind degree of *drib* is almost unavoidable in everyday life and the attacks of offended deities and of malevolent spirits have to be ritually combated on a regular basis (Samuel 1993,161).

Hence, bad luck and illness are necessarily intertwined with the anger of *lha, nyen, 'dre*, and *bdud*, and as a result, daily life must be oriented towards the pacification of these forces. Furthermore, the assumption that these beings are concentrated

throughout the physical landscape means that a great deal of activity must be undertaken in their mediation.

> In the Eight Classes, local and regional gods such as *nyen, sadak, tsen*, and *lha*, who may themselves be the objects of regular cult-offerings, primarily by lay people, are included along with spirits such as the *du*, who are entirely malevolent. All, from the point of view of the lamas, are possible sources of affliction whom they may need to combat though Tantric ritual (Samuel 1993, 163).

Therefore, the influences of spirits, demons, and gods represent a pressing cosmological issue necessitating professionals adept at ritual to address them.

The Formative Mytho-Historical Context

Gcod, as ritual and profession, follows historical and prehistorical precedents, both mythological and empirical, that are necessarily intertwined with a narrative that involves the integration, conversion, and support of demonic forces in prehistorical Tibet. These narratives along with Tibetan culture itself are inseparable from an animistic cosmology in which demons are close players in the affairs of human beings. The Tibetan mythical narratives were what came to define the development of Tibetan religion since the seventh century (especially in the manner in which they became subsumed by Buddhism). Functioning as a historical anchor, “A myth is felt to be true whenever it functions in the discourse of a community to ground action that is itself felt to bring about the success of that community, by those who yield to its authority to promote ends that are not self-defeating” (Kapstein 2000, 143).

Kapstein’s argument is specifically evident in the work of Slb dpon Bsod nams rtse mo (1142-1182), a forbearer of the *sa skya* school of Buddhism, who is one of the first to rewrite Tibetan history, the *Bod kha ba can du sangs rgyas kyi bstan*

pa'I byung chu ("The manner in which Buddhism came to Tibet;" [1167]), in terms of Tibet's Buddhist destiny. This history superimposes a Buddhist cosmology on to pervading myths concerning the origins of the Tibetans themselves. He notes that a line of Tibetan legend says "that a rock demoness beseeched a monkey, who was a bodhisattva, to satisfy his passion for her and multiply" (my translation). This type demoness called a *srin mo* (Skt. *raksha*) that is affiliated with specific regions of Tibet, pervades other Tibetan etiological narratives, and stands in contradistinction to the Mahayana cosmology.[2] The earliest Tibetan documents available, found at Dunhuang and elsewhere, evidence a Tibetan

> proclivity to characterize themselves, or at least their ancestors, the human inhabitants of Tibet, and indeed the basic nature of their national race, as being savage, uncivilized and demonic. The Tibetans themselves are the "red-faced flesh-eaters, the denizens of 'the little known country of barbarous Tibet' (Gyatso 1989, 33).

Furthermore, the *srin mo* etiological narratives likely predate Buddhism, revealing the receptive indigenous matrix for Buddhism during the seventh century.

A cosmology intrinsic towards the demonic is also revealingly illustrated within the *Ge sar Epic*, a popular story retold mainly in Khams and Western Tibet.[3] Along with legends of Gu ru rin po che (*Skt.* Padmasambhava; eighth century), discussed below, the *Ge sar Epic* provides more evidence to support that demons were important to the Tibetans in a culturally formative context, especially on the local level. For example, in an episode where Ge sar confronts a twelve-headed

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[2] These claims are made by Samuel (1993,167-168) and Gyatso (1985, 35); "In its explicitly female form, the srin mo is cast in one source as the giver of catapult and infantry. A bKa' brgyud text knows the principal *srin mo* demoness as Frog-head and Bloody-eye.

[3] The exact origins of the story of Ge sar of Ling are unknown. He was a mythological hero and king that is revered everywhere Tibetan culture has reached, with professional bards who sing episodes from his life, often fabricated from the bard's visionary experiences. It is clear that the origin of Ge sar tales extend back into prehistoircal Tibet and the earliest documents retelling his story are from Dunhuang.. (Samuel 1993)

giant, after subduing him the beast pleas

> Now I will acknowledge you as my master: with all my guile I will serve you, and with my magic lore I will uphold your power. Together we will do battle against your foes and destroy them utterly. In summer we will dwell in my domain, for summer cools her ardor on this peak; but in the winter we will journey to Tibet… (Wallace 1991, 105).

This Mongolian version of the epic illustrates the classical resolution of the demonic polemic by the Tibetans: a hero subdues the malevolent force, but rather than destroying it utterly, the demon becomes the servant of Tibet and, retrospectively, Buddhism.[4] Samuel notes that this duality plays throughout premodern Tibetan mythology, leading the fundamental uniqueness of the Tibetans themselves: "The tame implies the wild, while the polarities of wild and tame" and the tension between the two implies "a third position, occupied by the process of taming and the person of the tamer" (Samuel 1993, 217). That is, the Tibetan pragmatic orientation towards the experience of the demonic, involves transformation rather than annihilation; this dynamic theme is an essential underpinning in the mechanism by which *gcod* ritual achieves its efficacy and the *gcod pa* achieves his or her legitimacy.

The Period of the Kings and the Taming of Tibet

The recorded history of Tibet began during the Period of the Kings (650-850 CE), which brought about a more sophisticated civilization, creating a written language based on a north Indian script and introduced Buddhism from India and China.[5] It is notable in hindsight, though empirical history had begun, the Period of

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[4] This 1876 translation of the Ge sar cycle is from Mongolia but it assumes a Tibetan landscape. In the episode Ge Sar actually slays the giant (Wallace 1991).

[5] During this establishment of written language by Srong bstan sgam po in the seventh century, which "facilitates the redaction and regularization of indigenous Tibetan laws and traditions; the governance

the Kings became mythologized.

In the same twelfth century text discussed from earlier, there is also relayed an episode about Srong bstan sgam po (617-649), who facilitated Tibet's first conversion.[6] According to the text, the king had to tame the landscape of central Tibet which was problematized by Kun Jo (cch. Wincheng), his Chinese betrothed, who allegedly used geomancy to determine that the region was composed of the body of a *srin mo,* which would inevitably disrupt civilizing efforts.[7] Samuel asserts that the contents of this narrative function as "a grand design to secure the Tibetan Demoness forever and simultaneously to convert the Tibetan people to Buddhism" (Samuel 1993, 168). This task was accomplished by building twelve temples placed on the points of three concentric squares, which pinned the *srin mo* down, allowing the imperial Jo 'khang Temple to be built in order to inaugurate Lhasa as the empire's capital. This act subdued the demoness and is analogous to Buddhism usurping indigenous Tibetan religion during the first conversion. Gyatso evidences this by noting the *srin mo's* connection to death rites that predate Buddhism:

> There abound rites dealing with the dead, leading them to other-worldly realms, and demarcating the difference between the realm of the living and that of the dead. Buddhist accounts attribute the act of 'closing the door to the tombs of

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of the tremendous territory ruled by the old Tibetan empire, with its diverse peoples and collapse in the ninth century; and, crucially, the absorption by the Tibetans of vast quantities of foreign learning" (Kapstein 2000, 10). Gampo married a Chinese princess who "had become a heroine for Tibetan Buddhists during the later imperial period and immediately thereafter: she was remembered for having promoted Buddhist funerary rites among the nobility even before the conversion of the Tibetan court and thus to have adopted a definite stance to internal Tibetan debate on…mortuary ritual and the Buddhist cosmology…" (Kapstein 2000, 35). How all of this came about is uncertain: "The origin of the Yarlung dynasty, the family which was to end up ruling the vast dominions of the Tibetan Empire, is still quite unknown. The Old Tibetan Chronicle does not say when the kings of this family began to rule a significant part of Tibet, nor does it hint about any possible foreign ancestry" (Beckwith 1987, 11).

[6] Samuel (1993, 168) cites the *Mani Kabum* as the text describing the rock goddess and landscape *srin mo*, which is a standard Buddhist history of Tibet from the twefth century.

[7] Otherwise known as the Wencheng Princess from China who Sgam po obtained from the Chinese by force (Kapstein 2000).

> the dead' to Bon religion. If this is so, and our supine *Srin-mo* symbolizes what is truly indigenous in Tibetan religion, part of which is fearful, irrepressible world of the demonic departed, then Buddhism was not the first to suppress her (Gyatso 1989, 46).

Therefore, it is evident that the indigenous Tibetan mythological theme of perpetual conversion of powerful demons became a means to establish the authority of Buddhism in the Tibetan cosmos.

Before and during the time of the introduction and development of Buddhism in Tibet, there was a preexisting religion that competed for royal patronage along with it, which many refer to as Bon. However, according to Kapstein, "In contemporary scholarship, doubts have been expressed about whether there was in fact an organized Tibetan religion prior to the introduction of Buddhism and whether the term Bon, as used in archaic documents, names such a religion" (Kapstein 2000, 12). Although, as Kapstein continues to note, Bon only became recognizable after the introduction by means of contrast, it is clear that before the renaissance there was tension between the pre-Buddhist Tibetan indigenous religion and Buddhism proper: "Ultimately, this discord led to the disintegration of the royal dynasty when the pro-Bon king was assassinated in the middle of the ninth-century by a Buddhist monk angry over his persecution of Buddhism" (Goldstein 1997, 2). As a result of this, the imperial era ended and the country became fragmented without any unifying authority or a guiding ideology; a scattered aristocracy and declining culture left the Tibetans disillusioned about the present and nostalgic for the past. Furthermore, "Buddhism also paid a heavy price as it was driven out of the central part of Tibet. Then, in the eleventh century, Indian Buddhist monk-teachers such as Atisa visited Tibet and sparked a vibrant revival of Buddhism" (Goldstein 1997, 2). The tensions between

localized forms of Tibetan religion, previously labeled Bon, and Buddhism translated into a sustained polemic and the solvency for this lead to the Tibetan religion that pervaded the plateau from the eleventh century onwards.

As a result of the tension between Tibetan indigenous religion and Buddhism, ritual practices such as *gcod* were born. As discussed earlier, indigenous Tibetan religion has a demonic orientation, which Buddhism was necessarily obligated to address; the emerging Buddhist tantrics of the eleventh century had to acknowledge that "the suppression of the *Srin* and '*Dre* as one of the primary activities of Bon" (Gyatso 1989, 46). Therefore, *gcod,* as fundamentally oriented towards the taming of demons in a Buddhist manner, exists in contradistinction to indigenous shamanic rites of blood sacrifice.

When kingship ended in Tibet (ca. 900), the mythological historical narrative shifts to autonomous 'perfected beings' (siddhas) that commanded the power to continue the 'taming' process. The first monastery, legendarily attributed to Gu ru rin po che (discussed below), was built not far from Lha sa at Bsam yas (779); this being the era in which Tibetan Buddhist culture heroes emerged (Goldstein 1997, 1).[8] Therefore, the empire marked the cultural emergence of Tibet and the initial introduction of Buddhism, which paved the way for an unprecedented new class of leadership that gained their power through their ability to mediate between the invisible and apparent worlds. "Buddhism in Tibet developed through a sustained and subtle process, whereby the foreign religion achieved a decisive cultural hegemony, but was at the same time, as conquerors always almost are, transformed by their own success" (Kapstein 2000, 4).

[8] The exact date for Samye is unknown; most place it the late dynasty or the dark period (ca. 850-950)

Gu ru rin po che as Archetype and Forefather to the Renaissance

In order to gain solvency in the conflict between indigenous systems and Buddhism, a new role had to be created which could be replicated to perpetuate the vision of cosmological harmony needed to unite the Tibetans. "Archetype, which have slowly evolved through the course of history, are *a priori* conditions to actual experience" (Humbert 1998, 95). The new role or archetype is that of the Buddhist miracle worker whose origins had to be mythologically and primordially placed in order to legitimize and empower his activities. This can be traced to a late development during Khri srong btsan's reign (756-797), when esoteric ritual became preeminent by way of effective demonic mediation that paved the way for Indian siddha traditions to be transmitted to Tibet. The initial Buddhist renaissance of the tenth century was fueled by Indian and Tibetan siddhas who needed to legitimize themselves within a Tibetan cultural context. The main prototype and predecessor for these siddhas was Gu ru rin po che (eighth century). Kapstein drawing form the legendary account within the *Sba bzhed* (*Testament of Ba*, Dunhuang text, eighth century) describes the legend of how the figure appeared and subdued a host of demons, who were obstructing the building of a temple at Bsam yas, with Buddhist esoteric ritual, in order to facilitate construction.[9] Based on the documents, not present day lineage narratives, it is clear Gu ru rin po che did exist outside the grand mythical narratives. According to the *Testament of Ba,* "…Padmasambhava did visit central Tibet at the time of the foundation of Samye, perhaps meeting there with the

[9] Samye was a Central Tibetan monastery built in the between the eighth and tenth centuries, a transitional event into the second conversion at the end of the dynastic period.

king…;" furthermore, "the affirmations of the Vajrakila manuscript to the effect that Padmasambhava was a charismatic Tantric master with a following in Nepal and a growing group of disciples in southern Tibet…" (Kapstein 2000, 159).

The emergence of this figure marks a point in Tibetan history when the drive for power became subsumed by a need to construct an ideology and culture that creates meaning and social harmony. Kapstein notes that along with narratives about Srong bstan sgam po's reign, legends of Gu ru rin po che form the mythical backdrop for Tibet's renaissance.

> From the eleventh century onward, the Tibetan vision of the old order became increasingly defined by the ongoing elaboration of two great cycles of myths of imperial Tibet…Padmasambhava, now the 'precious guru ' of the Tibetan people as a whole, who dominates even the figure of the Tsenpo. It is his teaching of esoteric means to achieve swift liberation that becomes doctrinally preeminent (Kapstein 2000, 48).

As discussed below, the paradigm of the 'subjugation of demons' by the siddha is essential to the Tibetan narratives of the second conversion. Gu ru rin po che himself, argues Kapstein, "emerged from the margins of the old Tibetan empire to become, in effect, the royal master of the Tibetan people as a whole" (Kapstein 2000, 155). He did so by addressing local concerns-the need for demonic mediation-with esoteric Buddhism and thaumaturgy which clearly became a archetypal precedent for the types of religious professionals to emerge later.

The Siddha Religious Professional and the New Tibetan Soteriological Orientation

These religious professionals shaped the form of Buddhism that developed in Tibet, an early success of which was *gcod*. The history of this Indian movement starts at the end of the Gupta period (320-650 CE), which was a time of cohesion

during Indian history. The Gupta center collapsed and remaining power structures were seized and by the seventh century a feudal society emerged with various local rulers consolidating their power. Ronald Davidson (2002) asserts that this medieval feudal social context (550-1150) lead to a transformations in Buddhism and Hinduism. He argues that "esoteric Buddhism is a direct Buddhist response to the feudalization of Indian society in the early medieval period, a response that involves much of the sacralization of that period's social world" (Davidson 2002, 2). The pervasive presence of power due to close local rule of Indian territories resulted in a new type of culture-one that is more violent and dramatic-and this new way of living mediated the transmission and continuation of Buddhist traditions.

As a result of the power vacuum that ensued after the collapse of the Gupta, by the seventh century the powerful monasteries of the East began to fortify and expand themselves in order to adapt to the incessant play of power in their respective regions. Because of the decline of an Indian central authority, "problems with patronage continued to afflict the monasteries, so that they increasingly operated like the feudal lords that granted themselves land and prerogatives" (Davidson 2005, 29). The main types of services these monasteries performed were esoteric ritual and monastic education, which were remnants from Gupta institutional support. With the rapid demographic changes occurring in Eastern India, before the coalescence of the Pala Dynasty (750-950), the demand for a more localized soteriology was answered by the Buddhist siddha who represented a new social prototype that provided to "regional centers and disenfranchised groups a model of autonomous power outside the artifice of caste Hinduism and offered sophisticated religious approval that did

not require the abandonment of regional identity, as opposed to the depersonalization that Buddhist monks experienced in their great monasteries" (Davidson 2005, 33). These figures must have been popular because there was a marked absorption and domestication of the siddha tradition in the major Buddhist monasteries by the eleventh century.

The manner in which Buddhism was transformed by this process can be attributed to the development of Tantric elements. The siddha tradition, when it was absorbed into the surviving Indian centers of Buddhism, began the limited appropriation of saivasiddhanta and sakta ritual practices, which have their origins during the Gupta period and became refined into Tantra after the sixth century. This was necessary because of the medieval economic and political context, which required figures to meet the concerns of the transformed demographic. "Through this institutionalization of noninstitutional esotericism, the tantric canon integrated ideas and behaviors derived from Shaiva, Shakta, Shaura, Vaishnava, regional divinities, and local cemetery siddha traditions, all on a catch as-catch-can basis" (Davidson 2005, 34).

Thus, the new type of Buddhist, called a *siddha*, “configures his practice through the metaphor of becoming the overlord of a *mandala* of vassals, and issues of scripture, language, and community reflect the political and social models employed in the surrounding feudal society” (Davidson 2002; 2). This created a paradigm of autonomy and locality that did not rely on a strict hierarchy or superstructure that guided its monastic precedent. “It appears that the central and defining metaphor for mature esoteric Buddhist is that of an individual assuming kingship and exercising

dominion...It is the Buddhist version of the early medieval feudalization of divinity…" (Davidson 2002, 121). In this new system, the center becomes neither God nor Buddha, but a deity who assumes nirvana and exercises dominion and power over this world.[10] The esoteric deities, Heruka, Vajrapani, and Hevajra become transformed into the new supreme Buddhist deities of the *anuttarayogatantra*, whom, rather than acting as objects of worship, become the objects of identification.[11]

The development of *anuttarayogatantra* became decisive means by which the new renaissance pan-Buddhist soteriological identity developed. Just as in medieval India, changes in Tibetan demographics and the decline of central authority meant that there was void in soteriology that was previously filled by the king, who either was linked to the heavens or conceived as *cakravartin*.[12] Temporal power became obtainable and sustainable for those who knew how to consolidate it for themselves. Therefore, the impetus for the Tibetan renaissance can be partially isolated in the firm importation of the Buddhist *anuttrayogatantra,* which became the ritual method to assume this-worldly dominion. This process began in the tenth century when the remnant royal aristocracy desired to reinvigorate Tibetan identity. The remnant kingdom of Gu ge in Western Tibet became the main sponsor of the Buddhist reformation projects. Because the of the perceived degradation of Buddhism there, the Western kingdom sent a party of twenty-seven men to Kashmir to learn the latest esoteric-tantric hybrid forms of Buddhism; Rin chen bsang po was the only survivor. Upon returning to Gu ge, he received the official patronage and built nearly a hundred

[10] i.e. *vidydharacakravartin*
[11] These are the main tantric deities assumed to have dominion over the ritual as authoritative basis and practical goal for esoteric ritual. See Davidson (2002).
[12] See Wallace (1991) for kingship etiology plus Kapstein (2000) for bsang po as chakravartin

temples.[13] Bsang po, along with Atisa, is among the first Tantric trained translators that brought preeminence to their occupation. Davidson argues that this is the historical beginning of the Tibetan adaptation to the siddha traditions and the renaissance itself.

In order for the new models of Buddhism to gain prominence in Tibet, there had to be a transformation from the Indian medieval traditions into an apparatus that could unify Tibet. This began at the end of the Tibetan empire when,

> Extending themselves in the ritual sphere to postmortem rites, religious healing, magical systems, and the composition of Tibetan scriptures embodying a specifically Tibetan Buddhism, the religious aristocrats, temple wardens, and interment preachers made a place for themselves in a manner that we can dimply perceive (Davidson 2005, 83).

Without the patronage of a centralized state, religion became a profession that had to meet broader concerns as means to survive. As a result, the monasteries that thrived during the Tibetan era of kings were, at least temporarily, supplanted by a professional soteriology that solved mundane problems; the need for the maintenance of a centralized state no longer existed. This change in Tibetan society eventually lead to regret that would reinvigorate these lost institutions, but with a new pragmatic orientation, the ritual technology for which was brought about by translators who transmitted esoteric and tantric texts from the tenth century on.[14]

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[13] Davidson (2005, 108)

[14] "The esoteric Buddhist transformation of U-Tsang, begun by Tsalana Yesh Gyeltsen and continued by Gayadhara and Drokmi" who were followed by Go-lotsawa Khukpa Lhetse, Marpa, Ratnavajra, Acarya Marpo, and others and were "assailed from time to time in Tibetan critical literature as having everything from sexual lapses to homicidal tendencies" (Davidson 2005, 208). An example of this type of character is Mar pa (1012-1097) whose unconventional behavior in his instruction of Mid la ras pa and the pragmatic orientations of the religion he taught came to epitomize the soteriological orientation of the Bka' brgyud pa, who retrospectively superimposed legends and mythological narratives on him, creating yet another archetype (Davidson 2005)

The Cultural Historical Context for gcod Ritual

The overall history of the critical 'dark' period between the monarchy and the second conversion entailed a power vacuum; the lack of a sovereign authority to provide social security, meant that the types of ritual initially imported by translators from India were oriented towards protection and acquisition. "Individuals and clans sought to empower themselves in a chaotic and potentially hostile world, by seeking the identity of the microcosmic yoga and macrocosmic *mandala*" (Davidson 2005, 158). The medieval Indian developments of esoteric ritual techniques and tantric telelogies were precisely oriented towards this end. As a result of this, "For many Tibetans, the translation of the multiple killing rituals from their Indian masters, as well as record of their use, was eloquent testimony to a category of Buddhists suspicious of their environment and wary of their fellow man" (Davidson 2005, 158). The translators were not interested in learning about doctrine or philosophy, but instead becoming autonomous and masterful in their endeavors within a society where the social contractual sovereign that displaced power from his subjects did not exist and ritual technology for violence came to the fore. These translators became the first type of authoritative Buddhist religious professional that created an economy of soteriological service that fueled the Tibetan renaissance. "The translators sought out and employed their training in part for personal empowerment. For them intelligence and learning were tools to ends;" that is, the translators were not looking for 'illumination,' per se, but accrued ritual knowledge so that they can create security for themselves and, for a price, serve their respective communities (Davidson 2005, 159). It is at this point that a new soteriological market began and it became

advantageous for those that still had semblances of temporal power to follow suit.

By the end of the eleventh century the aristocracy and remnants of the wealthy Buddhist institutions during Tibet's dynastic period sought to become purveyors of the new ritual technology themselves; the 'Khon clan who began importing ritual from India in the tenth century and the continuing endeavors by the Gu ge (950-1050) royalty are the most prime examples of these aristocratic reformers. Part and parcel to this task was self-authorization, a project to ascend in the new socio-economy by way of reorganizing their past to conform to present needs. The remaining Buddhist clerics and leading clans wished to establish their power by way of asserting themselves as political authorities again, just as in the times of the empire: "there was no denying its power and hold on the collective Tibetan conscience, for every temple, every tomb, every monolith, and every ancient text or rust artifact individually and collectively spoke to the beginning and apogee of Central Tibetan political life" (Davidson 2005, 242). Therefore, to accomplish this revival a link between the present fragmented society oriented towards localized pragmatic ritual and the 'golden age' of the kings needed to be established. "In this imagined once-and-future history, *gter ma* revealers brought Tibet itself into the realm of the activity of buddhas and bodhisattvas, so that they did not belong to a border country but to the center of Buddhist mythos" (Davidson 2005, 243).[15] By discovering contemporary ritual technologies and cosmologies in the past, the *gter ma* tradition of the tenth-twelfth centuries, the golden age became actualized in the present, creating a unified Tibetan culture, and creating a pan-Tibetan identity for the emerging autonomous religious

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[15] *Gter ma* means treasure and are texts and ritual objects allegedly hidden by *rnying mas* during the period of the kings to be rediscovered when the instructions contained within are suitable for the times or there is a desperate need.

professionals.

As the translators gained the knowledge to become professionals providing ritual services to Tibetan consumers, their skills were transmitted upon Tibetan soil. This meant that the next generation of Tibetan religious professionals in the twelfth century did not need to go to India to acquire their skills and the latter developments of Buddhism in India became transformed and indigenized in Tibet.[16] "They translated scriptures, organized new institutions, developed a clientele, and assembled disciples, entirely without the benefit of having gone to India or Kashmir to study and attain their authorization" (Davidson 2005, 274). As a result of this, institutions began to be created that made ritual service more efficient in the religious economy of Tibet. Because "The clan structure provided the model for inheritance, for the transmission of authority, and for the development of family-based spirituality" these institutions gained great political power, which served local needs and, later in history, became the political mediators of international and domestic affairs (Davidson 2005, 274). Also, because of its institutional efficiency, Lamaism created a class of defined religious professionals that competed on the local level for patronage and won out because of their established authority, accountability, and efficiency. Furthermore, the pervasive familial-clan model of religious institutional organization when coupled with the esoteric siddha metaphor of the sovereign lead to royal plurality; the Indian esoteric model

> with its paradigms of kingship and filial relations (*vajra*-brothers and sisters), was extended to generations of family, to *vajra*-grandsons, as it were. The implications for Tibetan familial models being extended to the tantric systems

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[16] The most famous of these homegrown ritualists and transltors rNgog chos kyi rdo rje (1023-90) and Mid la ras pa (b. 1040) for the bka' brgyud pa and Se ston kun rig (1040-1210) for Sa skyas (Davidson 2005, 274).

> also meant that women were given a place at the tantric fest as equals, in a manner unseen south of the Himalayas (Davidson 2005, 322).

This royal plurality, thus, empowered members of Tibetan society on almost every level to become a part of the *mandala*. As a result, the roles of women were expanded and it became possible for Ma gcig Lab sgron (1075-12?) to retain authority and legitimacy as a ritual innovator and functionary within the Tibetan cosmos.

Information about the actual life of Ma gcig Lab sgron, who was active in the late eleventh century, is provided by hagiographical accounts and by some data that can be gleaned from lineage records within the same genre. "Like most Tibetan sacred biographies, Ma gcig's life introduces us to a magic-spiritual universe where the marvelous occupies center stage and the historical facts often recede into the background" (Edou 1996, 3). According to Edou (1996, 3), it is likely, given from the existent evidence, that she migrated from Central Tibet to India who learned from *panditas*, such Pha dam pa Sangs rgyas, a Tibetan homegrown siddha, who transmitted Buddhist ritual from India to Tibet, thus facilitating her return. Carol Savvas (1990, 285) describes the *gcod* lineages in general:

> Generally all the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism refer to the same lineages of *gcod*, known as *Pha-rgyud* and *Ma-rgyud* (Father and Mother lineages). These are generally said to be the lineages which came from Phadampa Sangye and Ma gcig Labdron, respectively, although according to many lineages, both the *pha-rgyud* and the *ma-rgyud* are listed as coming from Phadampa Sangye (to sKyoton Sonam Lama) to Ma gcig. Hence these terms *pha-rgygud* and *ma-rgyud* may actually be used in part simply to signify that there are two important figures one male and one female, at the basis of founding *gcod*.

The main agent responsible for *gcod's* diffusion was 'Jam dbyangs sGam po, a famous twelfth century holder of the *zab don thugs snying* lineage, whose history can

account for *gcod* in the present. 'Jam dbyangs sGam po was a disciple of Sa skya Pandita, the lama who was instilled with temporal power over Tibet by the Mongols and, clearly, the spread of the tradition is related to Sa skya Pandita and his lineage's ascendancy.[17]

The texts attributed to Ma gcig are presumed to be the work of her disciples, there is no definitive listing of her complete writings or teachings. "According to the histories, two of her disciples, sTong sde and Sgrol sde, concerned about what would happen to the writings of Ma gcig when she was no longer with them, asked if they could write down her texts in a more complete fashion , and she agreed" (Savvas 1991, 133). Thus, there is a reliance on oral and textual transmissions by way of various lineages that have preserved the tradition, as opposed to a canonization of Ma gcig's teachings.

The Tibetan Historical Model and the further Legitimation of gcod

A final cosmological theme essential to *gcod* and Tibetan soteriology in general is that of the perpetual advent of a 'degenerate age' (*dus ngen pa*). Typically, the Tibetans utilize a three period model of history as means to anchor themselves to the present: "The first period of harmony with the natural world and the second

[17] In the thirteenth century the Mongols invaded Tibet for the first time, "setting in motion a chain of events that linked political power with the religious hierarchy. That embryonic symbiosis evolved over centuries mutatis mutandis into a theocratic form of government in the 'Land of Lamas'" (Turrell 1997, 103) This invasion was actualized non-physically: the Tibetans knew that Chinggis and the Mongols were coming and submitted without fighting (Turrell,1997, 104). When Chinggis Khan died, the Tibetans stopped paying tribute, and Prince Koden sent his armies, destroying monasteries and killing hundreds of people; this was a relatively minor act of intimidation by the Mongols when compared to their capabilities at the time. The result of this confrontation was the appointment of the lama Sa skya Pandita, an arbitrarily chosen national representative, as temporal authority in Tibet. Once again, upon the death of Koden, the Tibetans stopped paying tribute and were invaded again by Kublai Khan and, this time, Pandita's nephew the Phagspa Lama was invested with authority (Turrel 1977, 113).

period of human kingdom may be defined as positive. The third period, one of deterioration, ritually addressed in demon exorcism and the death rite, is a negation of the first two" (Mumford 1989, 227). Hence, a dystopian and dismal future is inevitable, and this model of decline can be found throughout the soteriological proscriptions within the Tibetan literary genre of ritual texts; there is always juxtaposition between the ritual transmitted and its false corrupted form. In the Harding's translation of the *gcod* text discussed here, the concluding portions deal with this dilemma. Ma gcig fortells that

> This current dharma tradition will get all mixed up in the future with the behavior of the degenerate times…The meaning of the esoteric instruction will be discarded and you won't find anything there to practice, any more than in dog vomit…Idiotic Chöd practitioners will be even dumber than people feeling around in the darkness for something lost…My customs will change to their opposites (Harding 2003, 272).

Thus, because of degenerate times the appropriate means to undertake *gcod* will be compromised, which implies an inappropriate means to govern the imminent cosmos. In this vain, Ma gcig's prophecy implicates the corrupt religious professionals of the future: "They will practice through *te'urang* spirits and speak with clairvoyance, produce powers of *gyalpo* Pekar, do healing rites, subjugate demon slaves, and cause disaster in order to collect a bit of food or money" (Harding 2003; 274). Thus, it is a 'typical' religious professional, one that performs his services for survival and not the ultimate liberation of the entire cosmos that is implicated as degenerate, which is understood at its base to be a confusion of doctrine. Interestingly, it seems the only thing that separates the *gcod pa* or lama from the 'shaman' is a sense of orthodoxy because the Buddhist religious professionals still require the needs implicated by Ma gcig. The need to profit and gain by way of the performance of ritual on the part of

the lama or *gcod pa* is thus justified by eschatology: "the denial of present ill intent employs a double reference: the source of evil is pushed back into the karmic past, and is also dispersed into the collective will of the present era of decline" (Mumford 1989, 239). As religious professionals, those practicing *gcod* required payment which needed to be competed for in a marketplace, but in order to place themselves on legitimate moral ground, the projection into a degenerate age is necessary so that their work is for the collective will, as opposed to the local non-Buddhist religious professional that performs services for his own sake. Ultimately in Tibet, this justified the 'lamaist' monopoly on ritual and the disintegration of unique local forms of religion: "The Tibetan feudal model of inequality, interpreted through Buddhist ideology as a hierarchy of liberation, assumed that individuated time sequences had separated persons into different destinies" (Mumford 1989, 243). Therefore, by projecting the present into an era of decline, the Tibetan renaissance neo-ritualists were able to displace diffuse local religious professionals who answered the demand to mediate between gods, demons, spirits and the destinies of humans.

CHAPTER III

Gcod Ritual and the Tibetan Buddhist Matrix

The assertion that underlying the Tibetan renaissance was an indigenous matrix that was not necessarily Buddhist is not meant to undercut the dramatic and ubiquitous soteriological innovations during the period. Tibetans absorbed and mediated Indian Buddhism proper in unique and profound ways. This chapter addresses these Buddhist components of *gcod,* while elucidating what Tibetan Buddhism actually is.

The first facet of this discussion is oriented around the Mahayana. Mahayana Buddhism was one part of the indigenous matrix that lead to the development of *gcod*. Primarily, there was an existing and then reified ideology of the bodhisattva, wherein soteriological endeavors came to be viewed as interdependent with the mission to facilitate the conversion of all beings as means to eventually achieve buddhahood, doing away with the entirety of suffering (Skt. *duhkha*) within cyclic existence (*samsara*) in the process. One ritual subset of this line of influence, as present in *gcod,* is the utilization and appropriation of texts as means towards liberation. The 'the cult of book' developed as a part of the sutra tradition, in which texts themselves were understood to have supernatural qualities, words from the multiplicity of buddhas and bodhisattvas understood to be acting in this world. Because sutras had cosmological associations, the teachings were understood to go beyond conventional understanding, they could be used as talismans, thought to have magical properties whose presence in themselves could protect from and combat malevolent forces. Another ritual subset within the Mahayana utilized in *gcod* is

spoken *dharani* recitation. The assertion here is that a *dharani* is a type of magic spell, which, as opposed to a mantra that is usually associated with a specific deity, can, for example, vanquish a demon by its own power. Thus, the assertion that the Mahayana represents a discreet line of influence in *gcod* and the renaissance will be discussed.

Davidson's mature Indian esoteric Buddhism or Buddhist Tantra was incorporated into the preexisting Tibetan Mahayana matrix. Buddhist Tantra has as its fundamental goal the assumption of the identity of a deity as means to be worldly buddha, an enjoyer of cyclic existence and nirvana simultaneously. Thus, a component of *gcod* is the maneuvering within a *mandala* of *dakini* as means to eventually assume dominion within it. As a type of *yogini*t*antra*, *gcod* employs fierce female goddesses as the embodiment of the cosmos, a feminine superimposition on the esoteric *mandalas* utilized in the *anuttarayogatantra*. The integration of Buddhism in this manner is arguably one of the triumphs of the Tibetan renaissance and is what makes Tibetan Buddhism unique. Furthermore, the unique Tibetan *bar do* cosmology, a *gter ma* tradition discussed in chapter two, is present in both the cosmological assumptions concerning the nature of demons and divinities as well as the structure for the *'pho ba* where consciousness is drawn out from the body in a succinct journey through the realms of cyclic existence.

Classifying Buddhist and Hindu Tantra, Esoteric Buddhism, and Tibetan Buddhism

Overall, esoteric, tantric and Vajrayana Buddhism have been subsets of the Mahayana since their inception. In the Indian medieval situation described in chapter

two, "the Mahayana moved toward multifaceted development after the fall of the Guptas, being pressed on by a sense of urgency and of crisis within and without. Many of the directions taken were consistent with fundamental Buddhist principles…" (Davidson 2002, 116). However, the particular style of Mahayana in Tibet that the latter Buddhist ritual developments from India were mediated by is distinct.

Buddhist tantric rituals were absorbed into the pre-existing Tibetan Mahayana matrix upon their importation from India. The reason for this is that it was not advantageous to supplant and deny over four hundred years of Buddhist doctrinal and institutional development in Tibet. "If their heritage…did not lead to awakening in the manner of the tantric path, then they would be perceived as spending much effort over a long time for a mediocre goal—hardly a useful perception when seeking financial assistance to establish new and expensive monasteries" (Davidson 2005, 260). This means that the Vajrayana in Tibet cannot be viewed as superlative among the 'vehicles' of Buddhism. In addition, the goal of the siddha tradition, to become *vidyadaracakravartin*, was not elaborated on in Tibetan religion. Rather,

> one of the great topics of discussion in Tibet…would be whether the Mahayanist method of the perfections (*paramitanaya*) following the teaching of the exoteric scriptures yielded a result equal to the method of mantras (*mantrayana*) that employed the tantric practices and was said to lead to complete awakening in this very life (Davidson 2005, 260).

Gcod exemplifies this polemic because within it the tantric goal and Mahayana virtues are accounted for. Therefore, tantricism and Mahayana Buddhism in Tibet coalesced into a unique form of soteriology.

In regard to the Tibetan mediation of Tantra, it is clear that it does not

correspond to an essential Indian model. Lopez asserts that

> the term 'tantra' (and its traditional synonyms) is put in Sanskrit and Tibetan texts, raising the possibility that tantra is also a floating signifier in India and Tibet, gathering to itself over many centuries a range of contradictory qualities, 'a zero symbolic value, that is, a sign marking the necessity of a supplementary symbolic content over and above that which the signified already contains' (Lopez 1996, 103)

and "under a polythetic classification, tantra, instead of being reduced to some essence, would constitute the intersection of certain of a larger number of family resemblance" (Lopez 1996, 86). Lopez's assertion is further evidenced by Davidson's (2002) scholarship that esoteric and tantric Buddhism predate Hindu Tantra and are cosmologically and soteriologically distinct from it.

Esoteric Buddhism represents a discreet development in India that is differentiated from Hindu currents; it is not a "pale imitation of Saivism" (Davidson 2002, 113).[18] The maturation of which coalesced into the mature forms of Buddhist Tantra practiced in Tibet. Davidson (2002) and Lopez (1996) agree that there is a high degree of confluence between Hindu and Buddhist Tantra to the point where it is difficult to determine who is borrowing from whom. However, the practices of esoteric Mahayana, which form the basis for much of Buddhist tantric ritual, can be largely construed as an exclusive development from Mahayana Buddhism, which is supported by more clear historical records from China.[19] As noted in previous

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[18] Esoteric Buddhism was a pan-Asian development from the Mahayana predating the traditions of Saivism which came to structure Buddhist Tantra. As will be shown below, however, Hindu and Buddhist Tantra are congruous in many respects, begging the question if it was actually the esoteric forms of Buddhism that lead to the two currents of Tantra (Davidson 2003, 169-223)

[19] McBride (2005, 1) assumes this; sinologists are able to trace Buddhist developments much more clearly: "It has become increasingly common for scholars to interpret the ubiquitous presence of *dharani* (*tuoluoni*) and spells (*zhou*) in medieval Sinitic Buddhism as evidence of proto-Tantrism in China. For this reason, information associated with monk-theurgists and thaumaturges has been organized in a teleological manner that presupposes the characteristics of a mature Tantric system and projects them backward over time onto an earlier period"

chapters, the imperial metaphor is what came to define esoteric Buddhist praxis in its mature form that colluded with temporal power in Chinese and Japanese empires: "There appears no exception to the rule that, when the Mantrayana becomes culturally important outside India, it is principally through the agency of official patronage, either aristocratic or imperial" (Davidson 2002, 115). As discussed earlier, this is the manner in which the siddha traditions were diffused in Tibet, through patronage, which evidences the early precedent within Tantra for the esoteric imperial metaphor. In China what 'esoteric Buddhism' is understood as is more historically salient.

The evidence, dating from the fifth thru sixth centuries, from China presented by McBride (2005) shows that the distinction between 'esoteric' (*mijiao*) and 'exoteric' (*xianjiao*) can be clarified through Mahayana ritual and exegetical juxtaposition; that the esoteric was simply the 'superior' teachings because they catered to the wealthiest patrons.

> My research on the meaning and usage of the concepts of 'esoteric' and exoteric' in medieval Sinitic Buddhist exegesis suggests that both terms are deployed polemically by scholars. 'Esoteric' refers to what the writer hold to be a superior teaching; it is often interchangeable with 'the Mahayana,' and in particular is linked to the concept of acquiescence to the nonproduction of dharmas.' 'Exoteric' refers to ordinary Buddhist teachings, and the teachings of the 'Hinayana' sutras as well as some Mahayana sutras (McBride 2005, 27).

Furthermore, the fact that Mahayana Buddhism subsumes Buddhist Tantrism in Tibet is informative in discussing Tibetan religion. As previously discussed, the theme of the Tibetan renaissance was the combination of Tibet's pre-existing indigenous and Buddhist traditions and Buddhist Tantra from India. As a result, Tibetan Buddhist soteriology and ideology remained fundamentally Mahayana, while Tantric and

Vajrayana Buddhism are understood as elaborations of the same path.

The Medieval Mahayana Multi-faceted Cosmology and the Development of Wrathful Deities

Gcod necessarily embraced the ideals of the preexisting Mahayana matrix before the renaissance in Tibet. Mahayana Buddhism arose in India during the first century CE in contradistinction to the teleologies of its predecessor traditions.[20] "While in Hinayana Buddhism the Buddha appears and disappears in the universe, in Mahayana thought the Buddha is the universe itself, eternal existence" (Sadakata 1998, 113).[21] In addition, in the pre-Mahayana traditions, the goal of religious praxis was to achieve nirvana; "In that realm, beings no longer have physical, material bodies. There is only spirit, and no form (*rupa*) remains. We should not assume that the realms of formlessness is 'above' the realms of form, for it transcends all geographical notions" (Sadakata 1998, 75). With the advent of Mahayana there is an ideological shift to remaining partially in *samsara* as a bodhisattva while helping all sentient beings towards ultimate liberation and this-worldly benefits. "Bodhisattvas are beings undergoing religious training to attain buddhahood not only for themselves but also for other people; it is hard to say whether we would call them human beings or gods" (Sadakata 1998, 129-130). Thus, the Buddha's enlightenment is emphasized as the fruition of a transmigratory path extending indefinitely into the

[20] It did so under the patronage of the Mauryan dynasty (250BCE-150CE) during which the basic ideals of the *cakravartin* and bodhisattva developed (Craven, 1997, chapter one).
[21] Sadakata (1997, 19) sets forth the Buddhist cosmos: "Very broadly, we can divide Buddhist cosmology into two streams, *Abhidharma* and Mahayana. About a hundred years after Sakyamuni's death in the fourth or fifth century B.C.E, Buddhism split into two schools…which are collectively called *Abhidharma* Buddhism" and "In the first century BCE a movement to restore the origins spirit of Buddhism arose in reaction to *Abhidharma* Buddhism, which had become formalized and academic."

past. Furthermore, Sakyamuni's role-play as 'Buddha' can be repenacted by anyone: "There are two aspects of the cult of Bodhisattvas, a devotional one for the generality of believers and a practical one for those who aspire to follow the bodhisattva career themselves" (Snellgrove 2002, 56).

The new cosmogony necessarily revamped the manner in which Buddhism was administered. "New circumstances for the preaching of the scriptures were articulated as well, so that the word of the Buddha was received by an appropriate audience composed of the great bodhisattvas, like Manjushri or Avalokitshvara" (Davidson 2002, 147). This means that the scope and prevalence of Sakyamuni's teachings were exponentially inflated, creating new avenues to expand the domain of the religion itself. This was also a maneuver to gain authority (i.e. coupling the Buddhist *marga* with compassion and selflessness) and formed the basis for the various and extensive pantheons of deities that were taken up by the Mayahanists and tantrics to become the foci of *puja*.[22] Furthermore, the universe and its inhabitants underwent a large amount of growth with a new multiplicity of bodhisattvas and buddhas of the past, present, future and ten directions. Also, new 'pure lands' expanded, which gave space for the residence of these celestial beings.[23] "They possess their own lands, apart from the Saha world, in which they teach" (Sadakata 1998, 114). Therefore, the Mahayana innovation was to orient Buddhism more

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[22] '*Puja'* refers to the ritual worship and appropriation of a specific deity. It can be either Mahayana in orientation, i.e. towards stock bodhisattva such as Manjushri or Avalokitshvara, or the *puja* can be tantric, i.e. approaching Hevajra during the generation process in the *anuttarayogatantra*.

[23] Sadakata (1998, 144-149) elaborates as to how this cosmology expanded: "The splendid lotus Repository World was made by the Buddha Vairocana, who undertook religious practice for ages as numerous 'as there are atoms in the ocean of worlds.' He associated in each age with buddhas as numerous 'as there are atoms in he ocean of world,' and practiced purity, in the presence of those buddhas, great vows as numerous 'as there are atoms in the ocean of worlds.' As a result of the power of those actions, the Lotus Repository World came into Being."

toward the imminent world by creating a cosmos where an infinite number of buddhas and buddha-like beings exist., and engender an entire system of 'appeals' to address all types of popular needs and problems (e.g. dharani and mantra).

When the siddha movement (Davidson calls this esoteric Buddhism) matured in India, a similar enterprise of producing new narratives to create a more accessible cosmological setting occurred. Competing "myths, often tied to individual scriptures, were put forward. In fact, this may have been the strategy of the earlier Mahayanist and Abhidharmakosa communities" (Davidson 2002, 147). As a result, competing Buddhist cosmogonies emerged: One, for example, was "the myth of Mahesvara's subjugation by the important esoteric bodhisattva, Vajrapani" who was a form of Samantrabadra coronated by the cosmic Buddha Vairocana (Davidson 2002, 148-149).[24] The subjugation of a form of Siva-the narrative ties to a disparate cosmic Buddha-and the presentation of a stock bodhisattva in 'wrathful form,' thus, forms the base of Tantric Buddhism.[25] In addition, these myths had widespread popular appeal: the "longevity of this myth of Siva's humiliation and assassination is extraordinary and must be related to its context. An Indian Buddhist of the eighth century would certainly have recognized this kind of episode, in which the defeat of a demonic figure by a divinity occurs, for it is the stuff of epic and *Puranic* literature" (Davidson 2003, 151). Further, Davidson's evidence that esoteric Buddhism set the precedent for multiple mythological narratives assuming the same cosmology and soteriology as means to legitimize a particular lineage of praxis highlights an essential mechanism

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[24] Mahesvara a principle form of Siva that can be found in the *puranas*. Vairocana is the etiological 'cosmic' Buddha, the main agent in the genesis of the Mahayana world system concepts. Samantabadhra is a celestial bodhisattva, like Avalokitshvara who was previously discussed.

[25] Wrathful deities can be construed as 'iconographic apologetics;' being manifest as raw passion, the wrathful gods are understood to be closer agents in the happenings of the immediate world.

by which *gcod* was able to become orthopraxis in Tibet and the subsequent sanctification of Ma gcig herself.

The Classic Mahayana Components of the gcod Rite

The Mahayana segment of the *gcod* rite is the initial identification with Yum chen mo, who is the personification of the *Prajnaparamita,* which assumes classic paradigms of instrumental Buddhist rituals.[26] In this segment, the *Heart Sutra* mantra is chanted and visualized in an elaborate refuge rite which the ritualist administers as the 'Wisdom Goddess.' The main purpose in using the *Heart Sutra* is for exorcism, "as part of a rite for turning away demons (*bdud bzlog*)" (Lopez 1996, 217). Theoretically, the manner of the exorcism is related to older forms of fundamental Mahayana Buddhist praxis: the *Heat Sutra* 'mantra' is an efficacious *dharani* and the various visualizations of the text itself, especially personified as Yum chen mo, serve as talismans. Thus, this type of use of the *Heart Sutra* in *gcod* was a likely precedent for *gcod's* demon quelling technique. The main objective for the refuge segment of the *gcod* rite-the part that involves the invocation of the *Heart Sutra*-is to begin the conversion and enlightenment process within the malevolent guests, the first part in a barrage of liturgy designed to pacify demons. The assumption "is that a malevolent force has intruded into the human domain. That force must be brought under control and expulsed, to return to the proper realm" (Lopez 1996, 218).

The main text for the exorcism rite that Lopez discusses is *The Procedure for*

[26] "By the late tenth century the Theravasa tradition was still the predominant force within Indian Buddhism, but beginning in the seventh century two trends had developed at Nalanda, Vikramasila and Ondantapuri, the great monastic universities of northern India: the Prajnaparamita, or Perfection of Wisdom, the philosophical foundation of the Mahayana, which emphasized the emptiness of all phenomena as systematized by Nagarjuna (ca second century)…" (Edou 1996, 25).

Repelling Demons Based on the Heart Sutra (tum rgyas 'bring bsdus gi rim pa), which was brought to Tibet by Atisa (982-1054).[27] Within this text a portion of the exorcism rite parallels many versions the initial *gcod* visualizations:

> The ritualist visualizes the goddess Prajnaparamita seated on a moon disc, surrounded by buddhas and bodhisattvas. Moving to an even smaller scale, the meditator imagines that there is a moon disc in the center of her heart, upon which stands the letter *ah*. At an even more minute level, the officiant is instructed to visualize the letters of the *Heart Sutra* standing upright around the edge of the moon disc at the goddesses heart, not simply the entire sutra letters of the mantra, but the entire sutra…the entire sutra functions as a mantra in this ritual. The letters of the sutra radiate both light and their own sound, serving as offerings to the buddhas and bodhisattvas, who in turn alleviate the sufferings and purify all those gathered for the performance of the rite as the officiant contemplates the meaning of emptiness. (Lopez 1996, 221-222)

It is clear that the procedure utilized in *gcod* shares a common basis with this exorcism ritual, but instead of serving as a means to banish the malevolent beings to their respective realms, the ritualist uses the *Heart Sutra* to clarify the penultimate truth-enlightening the demons-who then serve as protectors for ritualist and the religion.[28] The efficacy of the *Heart Sutra* can be explained by way of two esoteric Buddhist themes: the 'cult of the book' and the use of *dharani* spells.

Throughout the development of Mahayana Buddhism, from the first to the eighth centuries, scriptures often espouse themselves to be magical objects; possessing the physical object of the sutra was thought to be efficacious in a number of magical operations. This has been called the 'cult of the book' and "was central to the expansion of Mahayana Buddhism" (Strickmann 2002, 96).[29] The talismanic

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[27] The previously mentioned famous Indian translator who became a legendary 'siddha' type figure in Tibet, winning debates and performing supernatural feats.

[28] The 'emptiness is form' and 'form is emptiness' proverbial phrase within the *Heart Sutra* is present within the *gcod* rite's liturgy is the main formula for instruction found in Harding's (2003) translation of the ritual text.

[29] Strickmann (2002) is mainly discussing the Lotus Sutra and Diamond Sutras is a Chinese context. Jan Nattier (1993, 153-223) suggests the Heart Sutra may be Chinese, supporting the argument that

function of the scriptures is intrinsic to the conversion of malevolent forces, so that "the chieftains of pandemonium are conquered, converted, and bound to serve the very Law that they previously defied. They have special qualifications for controlling the millions of violent demons with which the world teems…are pressed into the service as bondsmen of the Law" (Strickmann 2002, 142). In order to utilize the *Heart Sutra* or any other suitable scripture in such a fashion,

> the book-only requires due reverence and respect in order to extend to you all the privileges and security that its possession confers…you have only to treasure it…It must at all events be treated with marked attention and respect…The book is a true eidolon, a newlares-and-penates, and such devoted bibliolatry will bind to your service not only the scripture's own divine protectors but also the demonic legions that the scripture's new authority has bound by oath under the Law (Strickmann 2002, 97).

The personification of the *Heart Sutra* as Yum chen mo-by holding the *Heart Sutra* and the actual visualizations and offerings to the *prajnaparamita* texts-evidence that the esoteric talismanic function of the scripture is being used in *gcod* to pacify demons.

The *dharani* or mantra of the *Heart Sutra*, OM GATE GATE PARAGATE PARASAMGATE BODHI SVAHA, is also used esoterically within the *gcod* rite. Lopez (1996, 166) asserts that this particular phrase stands out as differing from

> other important Mahayana sutras like the *Lotus* or the *Lankavatara* that contain mantras and *dharanis* (condensation of texts that often function an mnemonic aids or as substitutes) in that it contains no instruction as to how the mantra is to be used, or to what end; its instrumental quality, the activity it performs, remains unspecified.

It is likely that the classification of the spell in the *Heart Sutra* is dependent on

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Chinese ritual methods, such as *dharani* and talisman use, were incorporated into *gcod*.

context; in *gcod* it is clearly acting as a type of demonic exorcising agent.[30] In the Chinese literature about the subject, notes McBride (2005, 14), "Dharma and meaning *dharani* are associated with hearing, completely maintaining, and not forgetting the Buddhadharma, the Buddhist teaching. These two types of *dharani* may best be thought of as 'codes.' Spell technique *dharani*…rely on spiritual efficacy and are something bodhisattvas produce to dispel all adversity."[31] Huiyuan explains this further as an activity of the bodhisattvas, and fundamental to Mahayana Buddhism itself:

> (1) they rely on the power of cultivation and habitual practice in the present, (2) they rely on the efficacy of *dhyana*-meditation. And (3) they depend on real knowledge deeply penetrating into the approach of the spell-technique dharmas; in other words, they understand the emptiness and interconnection of all things and the efficacy of the words of the *dharani* (McBride 2005, 15).

Therefore, in Buddhism the *dharani* is a distinct esoteric method that necessarily assumes a classical Mahayana soteriology.

The *Heart Sutra* "spell" as utilized in *gcod* seems to fulfill this purpose because it is utilized in the context of exorcism:

> the unseen forces of the natural world may be controlled by means of speaking or chanting spells. If the spells are administered and performed in accordance with their prescribed methods, one will recognize immediate merit and effects. People will be able to work miracles…Also, people may control the spirits, take a ride on dangerous and destructive flood dragons, and rouse the clouds to open the fertile rains to fall (McBride 2005, 21).

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[30] This is supported by the early use of 'spells' in China: "A number of *dharani*-scriptures open with a scene like the following, taken from a fourth-century translation, the Sprit-Spell Spoken by the Sorcerer Bhadra…The monks and nuns the Buddha's entourage are sorely troubled by demons disease, poisounous sperpents, and robbers. A sorcerer named Bhadra approaches…He then offers an invincible spell from his own supply. At first the Buddha vehemently declines the offer…But the sorcerer replies that the problems now troubling the Buddhist community are nothing compared to what they will have to face when the Buddha is no longer alive…in the end, the Buddha accepts the noxious spell as a means of aiding the current victims of these various afflictions…" (Strickmann 2002, 104)

[31] This typology is from Huiyuan, a sixth century writer in China (McBride 2005, 14)

This is distinct from Tantric Buddhism in its normative employment of 'mantra' that is associated with a particular celestial Buddha or bodhisattva: "This kind of specialized use of mantras by a practitioner under the guidance of a guru inside a *mandala* as part of a ritual meant to replicate the body, speech, and mind of the Buddha for the purpose of making him a Buddha immediately is what is actually different about Tantric Buddhist practice" (McBride 2005, 31). Thus, the *Heart Sutra dharani* is classified so because it is disassociated with the tantric goal of deity identification and is a speech act efficacious in itself to perform a number of demon quelling and other supernatural functions.

The Physiology of gcod as a Tibetan Mediation of the Mahayana

Before the offering of the ritualist's corpse in *gcod*, he or she must separate consciousness from the body to avoid the trauma of being violently consumed. The *gcod pa* envisages two *thig le*, one in each foot that represent wisdom (female; left foot) and compassion (male; right foot), which are subsequently drawn up through the central channel (*dbu ma*) into the six nerve centers, *rtsa 'khor,* that are thought to correspond to each of the six realms of transmigration, the 'energy' of which are ejected out of the crown of the head; this is referred to as the 'consciousness transference with support' (*'pho ba*).[32] Within this segment of the rite there are at least three lines of ritual influence: this basic conception of nerve center and *thig le* correspond to a Mahayana precedent; the manner of utilizing six centers

[32] "The structures of the subtle body, emanating out from the *cakras* and through which *prana*, or life-force energy, flows. The central channel, which directly connects the *cakras*, is of particular importance. It is said that realization occurs when the *prana* enters the central channel, hence it is the object of yogic praxis" (Harding 2003, 330).

corresponding to the six realms is representative of Tibetan religion, and the resultant identification with a goddess is associated with Tantra.

The conception of nerve centers throughout the body called cakras (*rtsa ‘khor*) is fundamental to both Hindu and esoteric Buddhist praxis, but exclusive authorship cannot be claimed by either tradition; the *gcod* physiological scheme assumes two aspects of Mahayana cosmology assumed in tantra. First, Snellgrove (Snellgrove 2002, 290) describes the Mahayana conception of the *thig le* (*Skt. bindu*) as the union of wisdom and means, *bodhicitta*, “which in the more conventional Mahayana setting depends upon the Wisdom and Means of a bodhisattva for its effective existence. In such a context it means literally the aspiration toward enlightenment, which is the driving force for his heroic activities throughout so many rebirths.” This was subsequently used to conceptualize yogic ritual process by the tantrics, so that it referred “to that vital force resulting from the union of Wisdom and Means, understood as the perfect union of the Male and Female elements” (Snellgrove 2002, 290). However, in Saivism these polarities are cosmologically and conceptually distinct: “The Subject’s form, which is a unity of consciousness contains also an excess, an abundance of awareness. This is deposited into the side of the object that is going to be created. So inwardly the object has the attribute of Shakti, Energy which is none other than the form of consciousness…” (Biernacki 2004; 258). In this case, in order for liberation to be achieved the sakti (female; object; base of spine) and siva (male; subject; cranium) must be reunited.[33] Although the manner by which these two aspects are mapped are distinct, the ‘resemblance’

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[33] Sakti is the female divine consort of Shiva who is emphasized in Tantric practice and the Samkhya cosmology

that Lopez mentions evidences that the union of male and female within the body of the ritualist are fundamental to Tantra.

The nerve centers themselves, which the *thig le* merge into and move through, are landmarks on the Mahayana cosmic map. They are described as lotus flowers with differing numbers of petals and a Buddha-Goddess is allocated to each center...The controlling element in this Buddhist tantric arrangement would seem to be the Four Buddha-bodies..," however, "When it suits a particular argument, locating the Five Buddhas within the body, or even all six, five or six wheels are specified (Snellgrove 2002, 251-252).[34] These *kayas* are mapped onto the body as follows:

> Three Bodies are said to be inside the body in the form of 'wheels,' and the perfect knowledge of them is called the 'wheel' of Great Bliss. The Three Bodies, transformation, glorious and dharma, and the Body of Great Bliss too are situated at the perineum, the heart, the throat, the head. The Transformation Body (*nirmana-kaya*) is at the place where the birth of all beings comes about; one is formed (*mirmiyate*) there, and so it is called *nirmana-kaya*. Dharma is expressed as thought, so the Dharma-Body is at the heart. Sambhoga is said to be the enjoyment of the six kinds of flavor, and so the Enjoyment-Body is in the throat, while Great Bliss resides in the head" (Snellgrove 2002, 251).

Thus, the nerve center system in *gcod*, on one level, corresponds to a Mahayana cosmology; on another level, the utilization of the system within in *gcod* corresponds to tantric union; and on yet another level, the *'pho ba* implies a Tibetan indigenous mediation of Buddhism.

Envisaging each nerve center as corresponding to a realm of transmigration, each association with the emission of a particular color of light, and the process of drawing out of each realm has deep connections with Tibetan Intermediate State (*bar*

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[34] In Snellgrove's (2002, 115-116, 251) translation of the Hevajra Tantra the bodies are described as having pre-Mahayana roots; the conception of three bodies arose with the Mahayana pluralization of Buddhas discussed above articulated by the by the Mind Only School while the fourth, Innate Body (sahaja-kaya) or Body of Great Bliss (*mahasukhakaya*) was a tantric development that arose "with reference to the experience of the Four Joys as realized through the fourfold consecration

do) cosmology.[35] Cuevas asserts that the positing of a *bar do* is a unique Tibetan development that has its roots in demonological existential speculation and became articulated by way of Buddhist doctrine:

> The Tibetan notion of the soul and its rituals, rather dissolving into the collective memory of an archaic past, seems instead to have been adopted into and only superficially masked by certain Indo-Buddhist concepts, most explicitly the theory of a postmortem intermediate state of consciousness that sheds the physical body at death and wanders in search of its next birth (Cuevas 2003, 32).

Furthermore, he asserts that the cosmological elaboration on an intermediary state was an indigenous Tibetan development during the period of the kings. "Since it was held that the welfare of the kingdom depended on the welfare of its ruler, special rituals were performed to protest and prolong the king's life and, when he was dead, to guarantee his safe passage to the heaven above" (Cuevas 2003; 28). Therefore, it is a sustainable that the elaboration on the intermediate state was a unique Tibetan cosmological innovation. This means that if a link can be established between *gcod's* consciousness transference method and *bar do* funerary ritual, then a firm connection can be made between the *gcod sadhana* and the indigenous matrix.

There are three parallels between Tibetan funerary rites assuming the intermediate state and *gcod*, which are evidence for peculiarity of Tibetan religion. First, the *'pho ba* as a technical term primarily refers to a Tibetan funerary rites: "An

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[35] The Tibetan Book of the Dead itself is a *gter ma*, an actual physical object said to have been hidden by Gu ru rin po che. The name of the cycle of texts that Liberation in the Intermediate State Through Hearing is apart of is called The Profound Doctrine of Self-Liberation of the Mind Through the Peaceful and Wrathful Deities. This "doctrine of the intermediate state received its fullest elaboration in Tibet, especially in the 'heart essence' tradition of the rNying ma sect, where it was expanded to encompass all moments of experience, including waking life and dreams" (Lopez. 2000, L). Thus, the *bar do* teachings are those that describe intermediate states between any given moments; the *Bar do tho gral* describe these intermediate states between physical death and rebirth. These teachings were especially important for the Bka' brgyud pa and Rnying ma lineages that propagate the *gcod* practice, a culmination of the *bar do* doctrine. This profound philosophy filtered down to the public in many ways.

attempt is made by the local lama or lay ritual specialist to draw the consciousness out of the body through the crown of he head—this is the orifice that is believed best to lead to a favorable rebirth in a buddha's pure realm" (Cuevas 2003, 70). Furthermore, the specific technique by which this is achieved is confluent with the visualization in the *gcod* rite: "The dead person's image represents him, and during the death ritual it travels in a symbolically ordered sequence on a specially prepared surface through the various realms of incarnation that are possible places of rebirth" (Cuevas 2003, 76). Third, the *'pho ba* visualization of drawing the energy out of the realms and offering to their inhabitants resembles to closing the womb door; "For each offering made by the lama it is believed that the deceased experiences the corresponding realm. As each move is completed, the gate to that world is symbolically closed and rebirth in that particular location prevented" (Cuevas 2003, 76-77). More evidence that the *gcod 'pho ba* has its roots in Tibetan indigenous funerary rites is related to the imagined phenomenology of the transference.

For example, the visualization of specific colored lights in each nerve center corresponding to the six realms which are subsequently absorbed into the *thig le* correspond to motifs in the 'womb' within *bar do* cosmology. The basic 'between death and birth' sequence can be described as follows: At death one experiences three meta-*bar do*s. The first *bar do* occurs at the moment of death and is described as pure clear light, abiding in which will cause liberation. The second *bar do* stage is where karmic apparitions appear in the form of peaceful or wrathful guides. Finally, the *sid pa bar do* is where one, if not achieving liberation in the previous two *bar do*s finds rebirth. Here, the deceased experience various colored lights which become

more or less attractive based on one's karmic propensities. An example of entrance into a particular realm of transmigration is as follows: "Be not fond of the dull, smoke-coloured light [note the light emission] from hell. That is the path which openeth out to receive these because of the power of accumulated evil karma from violent anger" (Evans-Wentz 2000, 109). Hence, if one has lived a hate filled life and committed anger motivated deeds, the smoke light becomes attractive. "If to be born in Hell, songs due to evil karma will be heard. One will be compelled to enter therein unresistingly. Lands of gloom, black houses and white houses, and black holes in the earth, and black roads along which hath to do, will appear. If one goeth there, one will enter Hell" (Evans Wentz 2000, 185). Thus, the experience of being drawn into the realms of transmigration by the attractiveness of various lights corresponds to the ritual cosmology of the *'pho ba*.

Demons and Violent Deities within Tibetan Ritual Cosmology

As noted previously, the pantheon of Buddhist divinities adopted by the Tibetans were the esoteric deities, who achieved their mature iconographic and cosmological forms during the medieval period in India. These deities often were dark, fierce, and wrathful. The reason for this is that "Indians have never conceived of existence as fundamentally good. They have been aware rather of its cruelty and its voraciousness and so they conceived many of their gods accordingly" (Snellgrove 2002, 78). The Tibetans themselves, as noted above, had an acute demonological framework for understanding the external world. The harshness of the environment, unfavorable historical circumstance during the dark period, and prevalent superstition

as to the imminence of supernatural malevolent forces were viewed as adversarial to Tibetan prosperity.

As a result of this, the Tibetan renaissance domesticated demons and autonomous ferocious divinities as means to protect themselves from their fears, but as opposed to India, the Tibetan wrathful deities (*lha khro bo*) were essentially benevolent; "There thus developed the theory of gentle and fierce aspects of the same divinity and this was quite in accordance with the fundamental teaching of the relativity of good and evil, of *samsara* and nirvana" (Snellgrove 2002, 78). In *gcod*, this mechanism of conversion, fundamental to the development of Tibetan religion, is undertaken explicitly through the offering of the corpse and implicitly by the particular utilization of the *Heart Sutra*. Furthermore, although the wrathful deities are oriented towards ends in the immediate world, their conception, ultimately, is intrinsic to Buddhist *marga* in general: "signify before all else the *yogins* rejection of ordinary human life and its conventional values…Abandoning the conventions and make-believe of ordinary human life, they fearlessly accept existence in its most fearful and repulsive forms, and so reach the stage where there is nothing to reject or accept" (Snellgrove 2002, 117). This is a pronounced aspect of *gcod* cosmology, which has a distinct indigenous Tibetan doctrinal basis.

The conception of demons and wrathful deities in the Tibetan *bar do* literature forms the conceptual basis for the *gcod* process. Within the tradition, demons and gods are understood to be two sides of the same coin; "a god may be a demon or a demon a god" (Harding 2003, 123); that is, whether a being is a god or demon is dependent on context. The *mandala* system of peaceful and wrathful deities forms

the cosmological backdrop for mapping experience in the intermediate state. Cuevas (2003, 64) asserts that this system is derived from eighth century Tibetan texts and was absorbed in the *mahayogas*, which are "centered on particular generation-phase tantric techniques, such as deity yoga, designed to bring bout a union with what is called 'non-dual superior truth.'"[36] However, "This set of peaceful and wrathful deities represents a uniquely *mahayoga* interpretation of the standard set of five Buddha families (*rigs lnga*) common to tantric Buddhist systems" (Cuevas 2003, 64). It is this cosmology that is assumed in the *bar do* literature that describes 'peaceful' and 'wrathful' beings emerging in the intermediate state in dependence on the deceased's level of awareness. "O nobly-born, if thou dost not know recognize thine own thought-forms, whatever of meditation or devotion thou mayst have performed while in the human workd—if thou hast not met with this present teaching—the lights will daunt thee, the sounds will awe thee…" and the wrathful deities will terrify thee (Evans-Wentz 2000, 104). Therefore, in the *bar do* a demon only appears thus because the wanderer has not recognized the non-dual truth that the demons and the gods are the subject and their immediate manifestations are due to his or her proclivities and propensities. In *gcod*, this cosmological and doctrinal backdrop is the essential and ultimate mechanism by which the *gcod pa* achieves benefits from the rite.

[36] Cuevas (2003, 64) places Mahayoga as a post-tenth Tibetan renaissance development.

Gcod as High Buddhist Tantra

In order to understand *gcod's* larger soteriological picture, the *yoginitantra* needs to be contextualized in terms of its overall classification within the bibliographical *anuttarayogatantra* category. Fundamentally, this class of ritual is centered around a *mandala* which is occupied by an esoteric deity (Vairocana, Cakrasamvara, , Hevajra, Vajrapani, etc.) and by means of becoming increasingly identified with the center of the microcosm, the universe itself becomes subjectified (Davidson 2003, 121). "One thereby transforms idealistically the whole of phenomenal existence into a mystic absolute, and in this vision of reality all forms are recognized as symbolic reflections at various stages of removal from the unity and centre" (Snellgrove 2002, 29). The *mandala*, is a microcosmic map that leads the ritualist to a state of dominion, which can be broken down into two stages; the first involves the appropriation of the deity as object and the second is the dissolution of the subject-object dichotomy and the ritualist becomes the *mandala*. "In the so-called Yogini-Tantras of the supreme Yoga class, where all the main divinities of the *mandala* may be feminine, there will be a set of nine goddesses, occupying the center, the four main directions, and the four intermediate directions, as in the Hevajra Tantra" (Snellgrove 2002, 209). Thus, as a *yogini* tantra, the *gcod* ritual utilizes a *mandala* of *dakini* in several distinct manipulations, which are all fundamentally related to tantric soteriology.

The *dakini* of the *gcod* rite and the "ranks of wild, blood-drinking, skull-decked" *yogini* of Saivism can be compared to yield a proper physical description of the goddesses (Sanderson 1988, 671). In Saivism, "The goal of the initiate was to

force or entice these Yoginis to gather before him and receive him into their band (*yoginnigana*), sharing with him their miraculous powers and esoteric knowledge...the most efficacious site was the cremation ground, the foremost of their meeting places" (Sanderson 1988, 671). Their associations with cremation grounds, their wrathful and demonic nature, and the iconography of the *yogini* are evidence of equivalence to the *dakini*, especially as utilized in *gcod* as functionaries within the red feast offerings to demons.[37] Furthermore, "All *yogini* belong to the family (*kula*) or lineage (*gotra*) of one or other of a number of higher 'maternal' powers...An adept in the cult of *Yoginis* can identify members of as many as sixty-three of these occult sisterhoods..." (Sanderson 1988, 672). In the *gcod* cosmology, Ma gcig is thought to preside over a number of *dakini*, composing her *kula* that is anchored in the goddess Tara.[38] Thus, a *mandala* composed of the *dakini,* as the cosmic backdrop of the *gcod* rite, provides a soteriological basis, which now can be described more generally in terms of the subsuming category of the *anuttarayogatantra*.

The Supreme Yoga Tantra can be best explicated by a bifurcation of its ritual process. The creation stage (*utpaltikrama*) utilizes iconography, specifically *mandala*s, to incipiently approach the deity as an object. During this process the ritualist initiates a host-guest relationship with the deity and confers offerings and beseeches it through prayer and praise that is achieved through a variation of the *homa* rite. By the ninth century variations on the Indian fire sacrifice (*homa*) was a

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[37] The traditional locale for *gcod* ritual are cremation grounds, cemeteries, and charnel grounds. This offers more evidence for the ritual connection between similarly oriented Buddhist and Hindu Tantra.

[38] A traditional Tibetan understanding of Tara assumes her to be a primordial bodhisattva who rejected being reborn as a man by the suggestion of her peers to more efficaciously spread the dharma, and because of her act wisdom became a celestial being. She is among the most principle deities in Tibet's ritual cosmology.

part of Tibetan ritual literature. The *homa* rite is generally a means to transfer offerings to the realms of deities through the transformative process of burning. In *gcod*, the white offering as well as the black offering is imagined to be cooked and burned thoroughly in an intricately visualized caldron. The basic assumptions of the *homa* are the same, the sacrifice is done "for the purposes of the four tantric ritual goals: pacifying (diseases, enemies, emotions), augmenting (money power, merit), controlling (opponents, gods, passions), and killing (enemies, gods, sense of itself)" (Davidson 2005, 35). This stage of 'creation' or 'generation' (*utpattikrama*) uses this basic ritual technique towards a *mandala*, a representation of the cosmos, centered on a tantric deity.

In the initiation to begin the identification process, the aspirant, with backed turned, throws a flower towards the *mandala* of the particular esoteric deity to be identified with; the deity on which the flower falls determines the aspirants initial *sadhana*. If the flower does not fall in the center (e.g.. on Hevajra) and on some other deity, then the initiate does *puja* (worship) to the subordinate deity, but every deity depicted in the *mandala* is related by *kula* (clan or family). Thus, the center can be reached through a progression of *sadhana* oriented, in the beginning, toward the periphery. "So within each section of the *mandala*, the Buddha and his family have an autonomous hierarchy that is capable of assuming the central position of the *mandala*…Likewise, the hierarchy observed between a superordinate center and subordinate periphery is a ritualized relationship of central to derivative authority" (Davidson 2003, 294). Therefore, in order reach the goal, the ritualist practices *puja* to allow his or her particular *yidam* to assume dominion over his or her existence.

Interestingly, the initiation into and practice of *gcod* bypasses this as a stand-alone *sadhana* that can accomplish the tantric goal, though lamas and others who have received formal *abhishekas* engage in *gcod*.

The final goal in the *anuttarayogatantras* is the completion stage (*utpannakrama*) when the god or goddess moves from object to subject. The various yogic practices discussed above, such as the fire sacrifice and the *'pho ba,* are all utilized in the objectification of the deity during the generation stage in *anuttarayogatantra*; a means to realize the power and nature of the god. The ultimate realization in the process is that the deity so painstakingly pampered is in fact the absolute subject, thus undifferentiated from the ritualist. With

> respect to the primary goal—as a result of his pursuing the yogic postures, breathing exercises, sexual practices, visualizations, and the related complex disciplines that formed the completion process—the yogin was said to observe directly in a controlled experience of the dissolution of the elements, which unfold in an uncontrolled experience for those at the point of death…the completion process is said to purify death, through the union of phenomenal appearance and emptiness (Davidson 2005, 38).

Thus, underlying *gcod* is the tantric goal of becoming the deity by way of accessing a *mandala*, which is composed of various *dakini*, which is indicative of Yogini or Mother Tantra

The Tibetan Mediation of Various Buddhisms: the incorporation of Anti-Marga

Ronald Davidson (2005) refers to the eleventh through thirteenth centuries in Tibet as a renaissance period. The reason for this is that the era was marked by a unique combination of Mahayana precedents, local and popular religion, and the medieval ritual developments of Buddhism from India. The manner in which these

came together and their final result is epitomized in the rite of *gcod*. Within it, there is a firm Buddhist soteriology coupled with this-worldly objectives which, superficially, may seem ideologically opposed; that is, the condition of cyclical existence, the suffering of *samsara*, necessarily implies liberation through renunciation, while popular religion is oriented towards the gain of health, luck, and happiness in this world. Thus, there is a soteriological contradiction within the ideological backdrop of *gcod,* which seemingly favors the embracing of *samsara* as a ritual end by way of catering to demonic beings that most acutely epitomize it, a domain of activity usually occupied by the shaman.

Buswell and Gimello call this tendency the "anti-*marga*" and argue that "Perhaps the centrality of *marga* to Buddhism, and its ineluctability, are nowhere better confirmed than those traditions of Buddhist thought which seem to challenge or deny *marga* but which also seem to end up reaffirming it" (Gimello and Buswell 1992, 23). Hence, although the *gcod* texts asserts that mundane problems can be solved and worldly power can be achieved through the ritual, this ultimately is in the service of the Mahayana ideal, the liberation of all sentient beings from cyclic existence; the boons of worldly endeavors are embraced, but only instrumentally as a 'middling' *marga* and expedient means. This bifurcated tendency is found throughout matured strands of Mahayana Buddhism, such as Chan and Pure Land, and represent means by which to resolve the inherent duality of existence, the polemic of which was articulated by Nagarjuna as the ultimate and conventional levels of truth. Ultimately, emptiness is form, form is emptiness, etc., yet there is still a normative and conventional reality where the drama of the world ensues and is

governed by laws, a domain where pain and pleasure exist saliently. Buswell and Gimello further explain this dichotomy and its implications for practice:

> On the one hand, Buddhism insists that the reality of the things and persons that comprise the world is fundamentally indeterminate and that all things and persons are thus devoid of any inherent structure or stable identity…On the other hand, Buddhism has been equally adamant in claiming that particular patterns of effort and practice… are necessary to achieving the liberating realization that all things are persons are empty and indeterminate; necessary as well to achieving that abundance of compassion for all beings which is possible only for those who have realized emptiness (Buswell and Gimello 1992, 24).

Therefore, various forms of Buddhism necessarily had to account for this fundamental contradiction.

The Tibetan renaissance development of *gcod* addresses this problem. First, it accounts for a host of mundane problems that undoubtedly persist in a conventional manner, which cause real suffering and distress. Second, the Buddhist *marga* itself is embraced through classical Mahayana ideology in an effort to actualize the bodhisattva ideal through rescuing others. Thirdly, the opposition between soteriological goals (the ultimate) and worldly goals (the relative) is further resolved through the assumption of the overarching tantric goal: within the *gcod* ritual are the necessary segments where the conventional and ultimate are united in the process and fruition of assuming the identity of a Buddhist divinity; that is, the matured tantrika achieves nirvana while embracing cyclical existence, and therefore, experiences total freedom (*anuttarasamyaksambodhi*). These ideological manipulations are the means by which *gcod* could remain legitimate in the broader pan-Buddhist realm.

CHAPTER IV

The Diffusion of *gcod* and its Popular Appeal

In the *mi chos* (popular religion) one finds that Tibetan religion addresses many non-soteriological concerns. These concerns are established in the first chapter where it is evidenced that Tibetans throughout their history preceding the renaissance were fixated on an animated landscape that was densely populated by sentient beings, the most prevalent and influential being malevolent demons. These demons needed to be addressed in order to maintain the harmony of the society, family, agriculture, weather, and health. These are the primary problems that *gcod* addresses and by means of its ritual process demonological threats are reversed so that beings that were once malevolent become guardians and protectors that are guarantors of tranquility in a hostile and fear provoking environment.

This chapter will contextualize *gcod* within Tibetan popular religion, revealing the dynamic innovations within the Tibetan ritual marketplace. First, the domain of popular religion and Samuel's theory concerning the clerical and shamanic valences within Tibet will be discussed. Next, a discussion of the Tibetan 'marketplace' for professional spiritual mediation will be discussed, referring to the *gcod pa* as a 'professional' while noting his or her competitors. Next, the folk cosmology will be described which was/is the backdrop for the varieties of demonic mediations in Tibet.[39] Fourth, the two shamanic aspects of the *gcod* rite will be

[39] "In general it can be asserted that the religious practice of the layman is still strongly under the influence of the pre-Buddhist and folk heritage. He is familiar from his childhood with the epic deeds and marvelous happenings with which the literature and traditions deriving from this heritage are

discussed in terms of their innovative transmutation by Tibetan lamas. Finally, some general comments will be made as to the appropriateness of calling *gcod* a shamanic practice.

The Pragmatic Orientations of Tibetan Religion and the 'Civilized Shamans' Theory

Along with *gcod's* soteriological components, the ritual praxis also indicates that Tibetan religion, on the ground, exists in specific and mediated forms that are manifested in instrumental ritual activity of many types. The term *mi chos* (lit. 'human religion;' Eng. popular religion) within Tibetan soteriology, suggests a level of religious mediation that is this-worldly (i.e. exorcism rites, healing, weathermaking, cursing, etc.). As Stephen Teiser (1988, 435) notes about popular religion in China, "however it is defined, is best analyzed in smaller units like spirit possession, morality, cosmology, and family religion." Popular religion in China, due to the presence of evidence and record, is easier to historically elucidate and tends towards these features. Additionally, for Teiser, it is the popular forms of religious activity that elucidate what Chinese religion is generally and essentially; however, popular religion remains the least elucidated form of praxis in Buddhist studies. When Teiser (1988, 215) rethinks popular or folk categories of religion: "For 'popular religion' and 'folk religion' are most often used as leftover categories; whatever is not part of Buddhism or Taoism or state religion must fall into this convenient bin….But as long as Chinese religion is viewed from the top downward, the most persistent forms of ritual activity will be relegated to the unchanging and lackluster heap of 'popular religion.'" His two books, *The Ghost Festival in*

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filled. The particular kind of religious feeling which gives life to them regulates all the world of the demonic and divine" (Tucci 1988, 165).

Medieval China and *The Scripture on the Ten Kings*, imply a economy or forum where religion is lived in China; the monastic and lay, the clerical and popular converge at the point wherein one strata demands assistance from the other. The religious professional needs the masses for subsistence, and the populace needs the professional to allay their fear; it is this popular/professional intersection that is explanative of *gcod's* development and is what most accurately explicates religion on the ground for the majority in premodern Tibet

The Tibetan *mi chos* resembles Tesiser's category of Chinese popular religion. Tucci (1988, 187) notes that "entire spiritual life of the Tibetan is defined by a permanent attitude of defence, by a constant effort to appease and propitiate the powers whom he fears." Assuming this mentality, Geoffrey Samuel, in *Civilized Shamans*, takes the class of religious professionals that would mediate and provide services in such a domain and calls them "shamans."[40] "The specific form that Buddhism has taken in Tibet is bound up with this nexus between the pursuit of enlightenment by a minority and the desire for shamanic services by the majority" (Samuel 1993, 9). The ritual practice of *gcod* fits into this framework: it is mainly concerned with, even if superficially, the pacification and appropriation of demons within an animistic worldview.[41] Furthermore, *gcod* clearly has a strong Buddhist basis, yet performs a shamanic service and it accomplishes this by way of "a hybrid fusion between an external world in harmony on the one hand and inner enlightenment on the other" (Mumford 1989; 29). Therefore, because the service and result are the same in the *gcod* rite, as in a Tibetan folk ritual, *gcod* had to develop in

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[40] A semantic discussion of 'shamanism' is given at the end of this chapter
[41] Belief in the ubiquitous presence of spirits, both of the departed and animating natural objects.

a marketplace of ritual activity, where it provided an efficacious means to solve mundane problems; "Tantric rites employed by many lamas…mediate between monastic and shamanic orientations" (Mumford 1989, 7). Hence, shamanic forms of Tibetan religion, as Samuel argues, were intrinsic to Tibet's historical and social circumstance.

During the Tibetan Dark Age, the period immediately preceding the renaissance, "The decline of clerical Buddhism at this time is traditionally attributed to the persecution by the last king, Glang dar ma, but it would probably have followed on the fall of the united Tibetan state in any case." (Samuel 1993, 455). This thesis, that shamanic forms of religion prevail in settings of decentralized power, is congruous with the Davidson's (2002) claims concerning the medieval impetus for the development of the siddha traditions in India on the point of the ascension of a new class of religious 'professionals.' Furthermore, during the premodern period, 'statelessness' is what characterized Tibetan civilization, remaining static while India went through a number of subsequent dramatic changes after its medieval period. "Central Tibet, the Dalai Lama's government and the great monastic institutions around Lhasa, form only part of the context within which Tibetan Buddhism, and Tibetan religion as a whole took shape and operated" (Samuel 1993, 3). Even with the ascension of the great sects of Tibetan Buddhism buttressed by Mongolian and Manchurian power, there was still the "limited presence of a state apparatus" (Samuel 1996, 4). This meant that those performing ritual services on the local level had a great deal of autonomy and competitive leeway.

Tibetan Religious Professionals and Their Shared Functional Cosmology

During the renaissance and throughout the premodern period, Tibet contained a type of religious economy, marked by a set of autonomous ritualists that answered popular needs. The sociological concept of profession, argues Manning, elucidates the manner in which shamanic services diffused within communities. "The term profession itself is old, going back to at least 1610 with reference to 'a body of person engaged in a calling'" and Manning (1976, 74) argues that it can be mapped on a set of basic professional attributes. Each attribute of the "professional" in Manning's (1976) theory can be applied to the *gcod pa* working in the Tibetan renaissance and premodern contexts. First, "The particular professions presuppose the existence of culture-wide, transcending, professional communities of peers;" the discussion below of the *gcod* pa's competitors along with Davidson's and Samuel's discussion evidences the presence of this attribute (76). Second, "A control of time is afforded to the professional practitioner;" as ritual master, the *gcod pa* dictates the duration and contents of the rite in a proscribed or improvised manner (77). Third, "The true profession is practiced at the edge of extant knowledge;" the *gcod pa* is appealing to a wider cosmology and metaphysic that requires vast amounts of training and learning to achieve expertise in (77). Fourth, "A profession is practiced under a protecting normative umbrella;" the previously discussed cosmologies and mythological narratives suggest along with the general confluence between the *gcod pa* and clerical professional that *gcod* assumed a normative Tibetan worldview (77). And, finally, fifth, "Proto-professional practices are socially licensed;" this is the case in Tibet with

its system of lineages in general (82). Clearly, the *gcod pa* who conducts ritual on behalf of his or her community falls under the 'professional' umbrella, indicating that *gcod* itself, along with competing ritual technologies, formed the basis of popular religious economy.

According to Berglie, there were three main categories of these professionals that performed what Samuel (1993) would call 'shamanic services.' First, the *dpa' bo* (spirit medium), who is mentioned by Tucci (1988), Mumford (1989) and Berglie (1976) as being the shamanic competitor to the lama, is capable of communicating with gods and demons by way of possession, which can be distinguished from the *bla ma's* identification with the deity on a number of phenomenological and ritual levels.[42] Interestingly, the Tibetan mediums, such as the '*dpa bo,* obtain their legitimacy from a interpretation of the Tibetan Buddhist conversion narrative, which also authorizes the lama to act in the same forum:

> The *dpa' bos* have a foundation myth…it was Guru rin po che (i.e. Padmasambhava) who invited the first *dpa' bos* to come to Tibet from neighboring regions so that they could cure illnesses afflicting Tibetans at that time. He invited the *dpa' bos* to come, one from each of the four cardinal points, hence they are called *phyogs* (or Zur*) bzhi dpa' rab bzhi bo*. Everything the present day *dpa' bo* can do when possessed can be done because of the archetypical acts of these four *dpa' bos*. They were referred to at séances. (Berglie 1976, 41).

With such an enduring mythological precedent and traditional value, spirit mediumship in Tibet was a mainstream practice undertaken alongside tantric ritual. For example, high ranking oracles operated in the court of the Dalai Lama. In fact, biographies of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama indicate that the state oracle had a role in

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[42] In spirit mediumship he stresses the communicative aspect of the possession to distinguish it from spirit possession. In the latter, the behavior of the possessed is primarily regarded as his bodily expression of spirit manifestation; it need not convey a particular message" (Berglie 1976, 34)

his decision to flee in 1959.[43]

There are some general distinctions that can be made between different types of Tibetan spirit mediums as to explore the *gcod pa's* competitors. First, there is a hierarchy of mediums, which can be divided into to two groups: state (*chos rje*) and lay (*sku rten pa*).[44] Only high ranking deities possessed the higher mediums; local gods, ancestors and peripheral Buddhist deities possessed the mediums oriented towards the laity. The term *sku rten pa* denotes a Bon medium or shaman and this figure was much more local. Further distinctions can be made between Bon and Buddhist mediums. First, most agree that the oracle cult itself was likely influenced by earlier Bon practices, giving the Buddhist oriented mediums an indigenous basis. Additionally, throughout Tibet's Buddhist history, the two professionals coexisted simultaneously in confluence or competition. The next significant point is that in the medieval period, the Bon mediums had their niche in communication with the dead relatives of their clients.[45] However, the Buddhist oracles that became prominent after the renaissance almost exclusively became possessed by Indo-Tibetan Buddhist deities and bodhisattvas.[46] This makes these two types of mediums complementary to one another after the advent of Buddhism. Another difference is that the Bon shamans were often female, whereas the state oracles were mostly men. In relation to this, also, "a god will in most cases take possession of a man, while a women will be visited by goddesses" (Wojkowitz 1996, 408). Overall, the Bon *sku rten pa's* history and development is only known through juxtaposition with Buddhism and clearly

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[43] 14th Dalai Lama (1997, 31, 62)
[44] This schema is adapted from Wojkowitz's (1996, 409-454) *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*
[45] See Davidson (2005, 83) where he describes the 'pragmatic' orientation of Tibetan ritual during the medieval period.
[46] See Wojokowitz (1996, 421)

mediumship achieved complimentary institutional status.

The relevance of discussing spirit-mediums to explain the context within which *gcod* developed cannot be understated; they behaved in a manner befitting the 'shamanic marketplace' discussed above. They often are said to have supernatural strength and twist the blades of heavy swords into spirals with their bare hands in a circus of legitimation. Also, "Most future shamans are stricken by the shaman illness at the age of puberty. The same applies to Tibetan mediums, since most of them…became possessed for the first time when reaching sexual maturity" (Gibson 1997, 46). The age of onset, the initiation process, and the restructuring of personality mark some the universal features of Tibetan mediums. In addition, determinants of success are similar cross-culturally: "The fame of a medium depends mainly on the rant and number of divinities who use it as their mouthpiece. At least once a month each medium will be forced by its divine master to enter into a trance" (Wojkowitz 1996, 421). The nature of the deity, also, reflects the nature of possession; "According to whether the deity is of a placid or wrathful nature, the medium when possessed will either remain comparatively quiet or will fall into a heavy fit" (Wojkowitz 1996, 418). Thus, it was the medium who was the main competitor with the *gcod pa* because of his or her function, in most respects, as a demonic mediator, solving a host of 'mundane' problems and dilemmas.

Less important for the purposes of contextualizing *gcod* during the Tibetan renaissance is the *sgangs pa*, a ritual specialist capable of employing mantras to pacify beings.[47] Additionally, the local *bla ma*, while representing his clerical

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[47] "One who practices mantra, praise, community of ascetic esoteric trainees, Tantrika, Ngag pa, practitioner of the Mantras, one who uses mantras." (www.thdl.com 2006)

lineage, is able to perform all of the shamanic services, but by way of Buddhist tantric ritual. "The activates of the *dpa' bo*s, the lama and the *sngags pa* partly overlapped; they were asked to help in the same kind of situations: someone was ill, someone was struck by misfortune etc." (Berglie 1976, 35). Thus, the *gcod pa* mentioned throughout this volume represents a discreet class of professionals in coexistence with the mediums discussed above that utilize hybrid ritual to solve shamanic problems that were later subsumed by the lamaist clergy. Thus, it is these main groups of professionals who used the pan-Tibetan functional 'demon-being cosmology' to efficaciously bring clarity and solvency to the members of his or her respective communities, which will be discussed now.[48]

The Shamanic Tripartite Division of Spiritual Beings in Tibetan Local Culture

Mumford's and Berglie's ethnographic research of exiled lamas in Nepal is revealing in that both refer to the lamas, spirit mediums, and local shamans appropriating the same 'local' cosmological scheme, which is subsumed by the Buddhist cosmos, but denotes the activity of a specific group of beings.[49] Basically, the cosmos is divided into three parts, each containing a different class of demons; here are there iconographic attributes:

Klu The king of *klu* [serpent deity] is white, wearing a white cloth. His two

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[48] However, there are many of other types of religious professionals in Tibet itself. This creates a problem for those calling all folk/local religion shamanism. The shaman discussed here is best defined by Todd Gibson: "It would be tedious to attempt to enumerate, let alone evaluate, the many contemporary definitions of the shaman proposed …suffice it to say that the majority of these have in common the individual contact with the extra-human by a spiritual specialist in the service of his community" (Gibson 2004, 40)

[49] Tucci (1988) and Samuel (1993) both mention this tripartite division, but do not periodize or contextualize it. The tripartite division discussed here refers to a immediate 'folk' cosmos addressed in ritual.

> hand hold a wish-fulfilling gem. Surrounding him are countless spirits of the eight regions. The effigy (*gtor-ma*) of klu is white, and the tip is decorated with a blue turquoise dragon
> **Bstan** The *btsan* [warrior spirit] chief is red with a red shawl wrapped around his body. In his right hand is a fire sling, in his left the power of deluding [shed-gar]. The effigy of the *btsan* is red and triangular, and the tip is decorated with a snow lion.
> **Bdud** From a high cliff comes the demon king [*bdud rgyal po*]. He is colored black with tiger and leopard skin tied below the waist and human skin wrapped above. In his right hand is a demon's sling and in his left is a jewel of demon origin. The effigy of the *bdud* is black, and the tip is decorated with a Garuda bird [*khyung*]: (Mumford 1989, 85).[50]

Tucci (1988, 167) further describes this as the Tibetan folk cosmology:

> In accordance wit the general tripartite cosmological division the realm of *numinia* is divided into three parts, that of the heavenly spaces, that of the depths of the earth, and that of the intermediate world…In the god-lists of theological literature the attribution of particular *numinia* to one or another of these three realms is quite often indeterminate and ambiguous, but greater and less important deities are distinguished; thus the enumerations proceed from the highest to the more lowly and close with the lowest of all.

The various subclasses of beings found in this folk cosmology are the atypical 'guests' in the *gcod* rite, thus placing it on a competitive level with the *dpa bo* and other types of Buddhist ritualists, one of whom must be chosen by the lay Tibetan to intervene in demonological problems.

The key innovation of the *gcod pa* and, subsequently, the lama is the application of Buddhist morals to this cosmology. Gombrich (1997, 170) asserts that "The diffusion of the dharma does involve the diffusion of one feature of a very high order of generality: the ethicisation of the universe." As a result of this, because the taking of life needed for certain rites was imperative, it meant that Buddhism had to answer the problem addressed by the sacrificial rite, which is done utilizing esoteric

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[50] The prevalence of this cosmology is unresearched; Mumford (1989) describes it as being assumed by the lama and Tucci (1988, 167) asserts that there was a tripartite division, but he only mentions it in terms of spirit abodes in the folk cosmology.

and tantric remedies.[51] Hence, ritual technology allowed for the ethicisation of certain rites, allowing Buddhism to maintain its legitimacy. Another aspect of the Buddhist ethicisation of the local Tibetan cosmos was narrative about the potency of conversion, "that the worst mass murderer, once he has become a Buddhist monk, is totally harmless" (Gombrich 1997, 179). By adopting Buddhism, the most destructive demon can become a wrathful servant of the dharma, a *dharmapala*, which is a prevalent theme in the greater Tibetan Buddhist conversion narrative.[52] The question begged, thus, is if this ethical innovation in ritual and folk religion is what constituted the impetus for the second wave of conversion Tibet.

Gcod's Competitive Edge: the Process of 'Transmutation'

The mechanism by which Buddhism itself was able to spread its rituals, while maintaining Buddhist morals in its practice, is through what Mumford calls 'transmutation,' which needs more mention. Tibetan Buddhism, on a fundamental level, is a

> technique in which images of lived experience are transmuted into new planes of mental awareness...Buddhist transmutations also individuate such collective antecedents by employing metaphors.... Agricultural images of the ripening of fruit become karmic 'fruition' in the individual. Sacrificial rites that renew the fertility of the cosmos become the 'inner' sacrifice of the renouncer; the external ritual is refracted into an inner subjectivity (Mumford 1989, 24).

Thus, when *gcod* necessitates the ritualist to imagine and empower his own corpse in various manners, it is clear that the process of transmutation is occurring with respect to the 'red offering' or blood sacrifice. This is further accomplished through the

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[51] See Elwood (1995, 122)

[52] A Dharmapala is a protector of Buddhism usually created though the conversion of a powerful local demon or god.

imagined preparation of the corpse into a typical effigy (Tib. *ngar mi; glud*).

Gcod and the Transmutation of the Blood Offering

The ritual components of *gcod* already discussed are based in soteriology, the assumption of endeavor towards liberation, specifically in its Mahayana and tantric aspects. However, the layer deemed inferior by Mumford's lama is the purely shamanic level or ritual oriented towards immediate this-worldly benefits, which had to necessarily be addressed within the lama's schemes to serve popular needs. Thus,

> The lamas' ritual sequence thus becomes a means by which persons may be brought gradually from the inferior condition into a second and then into the third type, by stages. It is a process of transmutation in so far as first-type motivations are acknowledged as valid worldly concerns that must be ritually addressed and then incorporated into the higher levels. Tibetan rituals can thus serve functions of abundance, protection, and healing as they do in the shamanic system, but for the lamas these mundane needs are not the final ends served. Ritual practice becomes an occasion for introducing higher human purposes...(Mumford 1989, 184)

Fused within the *gcod* sadhana is a segment that is meant to address the mundane orientation of the shaman. This popular need was the mediation and pacification gods and demons to promote worldly stability.

The *gcod pa's* ritualization of the blood sacrifice by way of his self-visualization as food is meant to replace the literal red offering. In Mumford's community in question, he notes that that the cosmogony of the hunter archetype was concerned with the breach of an underworld contract that requires an annual ritual for recompense:

> The guilt of having offended the primal owners of the earth living in the underworld, who must still be placated to gain abundance, is linked to the sense of decline for rules of reciprocity set by their hunter forefathers...The deer sacrifice, then returns to the past and attempts to repair the breach...(Mumford

1989, 64)

When Lamaism arrived within the context of this cycle, it obviously had to address this need to gain the patronage of the community. This was done by way of introduction and maintenance of Buddhist morals in the ritual field. Because the lamas were equipped with ritual techniques, such as lucid visualization and mantra, they were able to conjure a substitute for the red blood sacrifice that eliminated the need for killing. As a result of this, the *bla ma's* legitimacy as a representative of Buddhism is maintained while addressing a specific fundamental demand for shamanic mediation. The shamanic red offering is now a *ganapuja*, which is a "*ganacakra*, a night-time sacramental circle, usually outdoors, often in a cremation ground or a similarly spooky and powerful location" that involves a feast, usually denoting the meal at an *abhisheka* (Samuel 1993, 126).[53]

This basic mechanism of the transmutation of the shamanic has a precedent in Tibetan mythical narrative history. "The Bon po regime is then said to have been defeated in a debate at bSam-yas, which led to the conversion of those who were to become reformed Bon, and to the forcible exile of other into adjacent regions such as Mongolia and Nepal" (Mumford 1989, 32 quoting Dowman 1984, 114). Dowman describes that this debate was centered around the dispute over what is ritually permissible and efficacious and Mumford argues that it was the issue of animal sacrifice that led to the ascension of Buddhist ritual paradigms and *gcod* (Mumford 1989, 32). Arguably, when Gombrich's theory is taken into account, the ethical polemic between different types of ritual was the backdrop for *gcod's* ascension.

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[53] Geshe Khempo Tsultrim's unpublished ritual text (2005) refers to the feast portion of the *gcod* rite as *ganacakra*; this is obviously a *gcod* transformation of an Indian precedent for the purposes of the transmutation discussed by Mumford.

Gcod and the Transmutation of the Shamanic Effigy

After the '*pho ba* and the ritualist's consciousness is no longer in his body, the *gcod* pa's next task is to clearly visualize himself as a corpse and butcher it in various ways to be fed to demons. This arguably can be construed as the visualization of an effigy (*gtor ma; ngar mi; glud*).[54] Tucci (1988, 177) describes this folk practice:

> Behind every *mdos* [alt. *gtor ma*] lies implicitly the concept of ransom (*glud*). The ritual accordingly requires an image of the person (*ngar glud, ngar mi*) on whose behalf the ransom is to be effected or who is to be projected (*srung bya*)...The *glud* thus obtained serves as a substitute for the sick person...it is offered to the demonic being causing the evil in question as a ransom.

In the same way, the *gcod pa's* corpse pacifies the demons present at the feast, which obviously implies any malevolent beings infringing on him in the present. Further, this shamanic ritual allowance within *gcod* allows it to compete with the local religious professionals. In Mumford's study, competition in the realm of *glud* ritual is salient: "In demon exorcism the use of ritual by Tibetan lamas as means of ethical and religious reflexivity becomes more explicit. At the same time, the dialogic rivalry with the shaman practitioners also accelerates because the Gurung shamans still claim to have the only sure means for dealing with local demons" (Mumford 1989, 141). To deal with the fiercest blood-thirsty beings, a live *glud* (i.e. an animal) is used by the shamanic professionals, but "since the he Tibetan lamas of Gyasumdo condemn the red offering used in the shamanic system, the ransom effigy must be turned into an imaginary offering. As a result, it has the renunciatory significance of giving 'everything' in contrast to the Paju shaman's chicken or sheep, lama's visualization of which must trick the demon into thinking it is getting the

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[54] *mDos* or *gtor ma* refer to the physical effigy object itself while *glud* denotes its function as 'scape goat.' In general, a *gtor ma* is an offering cake.

totality of all wealth'" (Mumford 1989, 151). Clearly, the extent of the feasts in *gcod*, the preparatory ritual segments, and the visualization of oneself as a goddess serving the meal evidence the fact that the transmutation process that Mumford mentions occurs in *gcod*, thus indicating, at least, a dialogue between different ritual professionals during the Tibetan renaissance.

Some Conclusions Concerning Tibetan Marketplace for Shamanic Services

A pragmatic approach to speculating as to why *gcod* became diffused throughout religious institutions in Tibet yields a simple explanation: *gcod* won out because it effectively responded the needs of many people. As this chapter has shown, there are many different types and techniques of ritual that function in a religious economy. In a refined and congruous manner, *gcod* combined various types of ritual technology that provided cutting edge services from the renaissance through the Tibetan premodern period. Thus, the *gcod pa*, as *yogin* or *bla ma*, was able maneuver in an arena already occupied by a variety of other shamanic and clerical professionals. The people themselves had the power to choose whatever type of ritual they wanted and from whomever. The high Tibetan culture that developed through this process of competition yielded the unique Tibetan religion that now exists. "Tibetan society was in certain ways made over in a Buddhist model, but Vajrayana Buddhism was in the process itself radically reshaped, initially into a set of magical techniques employed by hereditary village shamans, and later into more clerical and monastic forms" (Samuel 1993, 26).

The functional cosmology previously discussed suggests that the various

subsets of Tibetan religion exist on the same socio-cultural plane. Geels (1990, 176) notes, very simply, that the Tibetans "grew up in an environment where reality was to a great extent formed by various suprahuman beings. This dimension of reality is highly evident form man, who can be affected, for example, by the influences of evil powers or friendly gods. Man is not helpless in relation to these beings: with the help of the right technique or the right person, this suprahuman world can be influenced." The animistic world, where everything is inhabited with sentient beings, thus, implies an economy where this is mediated by professionals adept at its workings. The polemic between professional religious mediators is illustrated in Mumford's ethnographic study, wherein he studied Nepalese shamans and Tibetan lamas working in the same village: the lama's interpretation of the religious marketplace is

> the local Ghyabre and Paju shamans, with rituals focused only on this-world concerns, represent the inferior type, but are those Tibetan persons who understand only the immediate and mundane benefits of the Tibetan rites. The second, mediocre type is found in the monks of earlier Buddhism, who became Pratyeka buddhas, striving only for their own liberation. The third, superior type is represented by the Tibetan lamas who practice the Mahayana Bodhisattva ideal as well as Tantrism, since here, discourse focuses on "the liberation of all sentient beings (Mumford 1989, 27).

This formulaic statement, at least on one level is propaganda: the local religious professionals, shamans, are inserted into the Buddhist cosmos on the lowest rung possible, below even hinayanists. Thus, an understanding of competitive dialogue on the local level between the preexisting ritualists and the ritualists with newly imported siddha technology yields a possible explanation as to how the practice of *gcod* was assimilated to local forms, which eventually allowed it to win out in the historical lineage transmission process.

The Problems with Categorizing gcod as Shamanic

This chapter has revealed that the Tibetan marketplace of ritual was complicated and dense, which begs the question of the appropriateness of employing the category 'shamanism' to describe it. The contemporary construal of shamanism still relies on Eliade's typology of ecstatic experience, but his phenomenology of 'ecstasy' is never elucidated in his book. This state can be many distinct modes of consciousness: hallucination, lethargy, shaking, jumping, convulsions, dead faint, and more (Hamayon 1998, 176). "What is the use of this all-embracing word, given that all moves, features, or aspects of the shaman's behavior could be described by specific terms, particularly since each is carefully distinguished form the others in native languages and reflect different symbolic meanings?" (Hamayon 1998, 176). That is, why not use the epistemological framework of the group studied instead of relying on an empty abstraction? Roberte Hamayon continues to critique this category and isolates three main agendas in the normative employment of shamanism: medicalization (shamanism is untreated mental illness), devilization, and idealization (shamanism represents are rich and primordial past of our terrible civilization) [Hamayon 1998, 177-178]. In all three cases, something is projected-a signification that resembles the agent's fears and hopes rather reflecting the actual lives of people and, in the case of *gcod*, 'shamanism' distorts the true ritual technological significance and complexity of a practice whose components had to mature for over a thousand years.

CHAPTER V

The *gcod* Sadhana[55]

The main structure of the *gcod* rite is as follows:

1. Invitation and gathering of the guests, which are both the various deities of the Buddhist cosmos and normally excluded beings in lower existences
2. Identification with the personified *Prajnaparamita*, the goddess Yum chen mo, and the recitation and administration of refuge vows for merit generation
3. Recitation of the *Eight Limbed Prayer* with offerings and prostrations to gain merit
4. *'pho ba* or the consciousness transference ritual that separates the mind and body
6. *Mandala* offering composed of the ritualist self-effigy
5. Directing the power of the ritual by making requests
6. White Feast intended for *yidams*, lamas, and gods
7. Feast intended to satisfy karmic debtors
8. Offering the corpse to all beings
9. Feast offering for local deities and subterranean spirits
10. Black feast offering to satisfy demons and devils
12. The dedication of merit as means to accrue more merit

There are three key ritual components apparent in this prototypical *gcod* process. First, as it is apparent in the refuge rite and the two levels of *'pho ba* (rite of consciousness transference), *gcod* can be understood as fundamentally tantric. Also, the manner by which demons are appropriated and the goals of acquiring *siddhi* indicate that *gcod* has a *vidyadaracakravartin* (emperor of sorcerers) orientation, a conception of ultimate power as the coupling of enlightenment and this-worldly activity. In addition, the inclusion of Yum chen mo (a *Prajnaparamita* goddess) and visualized *Prajnaparamita* texts links *gcod* to Buddhist exorcism rites using the *Heart Sutra* as talisman and *dharani*. Finally, the structure of the various feast offerings, which involve 'transmutation' and effigy (*glud; ngar mi*) indicates that

[55] The use of *sadhana* here means the act of mastering, overpowering, subduing. (webapps.uni-koeln.de/cgi-bin/tamil/recherché, 2006)

there are local, popular, and shamanic technologies within the *gcod* rite. Thus, *gcod* exemplifies the Tibetan mediation of various strands of Indian and indigenous ritual, which came to define Tibetan religion from the renaissance on.

The 'Haunted' Locales for gcod Ritual

The efficacy of *gcod* is intrinsic to the number and potency of malevolent beings present. Thus, local shrines, monastic shrines, and other 'sanctified' locations where demonological influences have been subdued and purged are inappropriate. The *gcod pa* actively seeks out 'haunted places' (*gnan sa*) such as charnel grounds, thick forests, and deserted beaches.[56] These are the locales where demonic activity exists in its most concentrated form; they are demon 'hot-spots.' The most paradigmatic of these places in *gcod* ritual are charnel grounds, sky burial locations, cemeteries, or any place where gruesome corpses are exposed and that are understood to be the dwelling places of *dakinis*, the main class of deity utilized for identification in the rite.[57] In addition, cemeteries and charnel grounds are essential and pervasive locales for many types of tantric ritual.[58]

The assumption of the potency of these places is not taken for granted and a *gcod pa* must maintain "a strict discipline necessary to control the normally terrified attitude towards evil spirits. Even a special gait is assumed when the *yogin* approaches the 'locale of the ferocious ones' (*gnan sa*) as an aid to his intimidation, capture and subduing (*zil gnon*) of the resident demons" (Gyatso 1982, 321). Once

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[56] These exact places are mentioned by Janet Gyatso (1985, 321), but this necessity is established by every other source.

[57] Means 'sky-goers' and are the female protectors of the dharma that starting appearing in the rites within the esoteric movement during the medieval period in India (Davidson 2005)

[58] See Snellgrove (1959, 16. 18, 20-21).

the *gcod pa* has found an appropriate spot, he or she then must perform the rite of 'suppressing the power spot' before *gcod* ritual proper begins.[59]

Equipment Utilized by the gcod-pa

There are three main instruments used by the *gcod pa* when subduing demons: the double sided drum (*rnga chung*), the bell (*dril bu*), and the thighbone trumpet (*rkang gling*).[60]

The most thorough description of the physical characteristics and functions of *rnga chung,* as it pertains to ritual oriented toward fierce divinities, is provided by Wojkowitz: it "often accompanies the reciting of magical spells. The rattling of this drum also indicates the intervals in a religious ceremony…When jerking the drum rhythmically to the left and right the strings fly up and the knob or beads strike against the faces of the drum, thus producing a rattling sound" (Wojkowitz 1996, 399). According to the Harding (2003), the *thod rnga* (a type of *rnga chung*) is the most efficacious in *gcod* because it is composed of human body parts: the "'skull-drum' has the same shape as the *rnga chung*, only its parts consist of two human craniums over which a piece of human skin has been stretched, which serves as the drum skin" (Wojkowitz 1996, 399). The most potent of these drums are those made out of people who died in an accident (before the age of eight) or born out of incest.[61] The possibility that there is a correspondence between the *rnga chung* and the shaman's drum used in séance to aid trance is tenuous, and it is more likely that

[59] See Harding (2003, 310); *sa dmigs pa non par byan* is center or vortex of peculiar power possessed by certain locations which must be harnessed by the ritualist before the liturgy.
[60] See Savvas' (1990); her dissertation provides the clearest support for this universal
[61] Wojkowitz (1996, 399)

within *gcod*, the drum is used as a concentration aid, a type of offering and an attractant for gods and demons.

The second necessary piece of ritual equipment is the *dril bu,* which is utilized in concert with the *rnga chung*. The *dril bu* and '*dor je* in most Tibetan rituals are used together as a union of 'wisdom' and 'compassion,' the male and female principles, as a typical tantric means to actualize the combination of polarities between the two.[62] However, in *gcod* the bell has a different use. First, the bell is not sounded from a side-to-side manner found in other Tibetan rites in conjunction with the *dorje*, but, rather, is pushed forward and backward with only one tone produced in the movement; this most likely aids the maintenance of a slow and uniform rate when chanting verse. The second use that can be posited with certainty is that when the bell is used in tandem with the drum while chanting and performing visualization, the combination provides a means to concentrate more fully on the ritual; it is impossible to think (conceptually) while doing these four things at once.

The third necessary ritual tool is the *rkang gling* which is used as a means to summon the beings addressed in the *gcod* ritual. "The *rkang gling* should be made of the bones of people who belonged either to a very high or to a very low social class who died from contagious disease, who were killed in an accident, or who were murdered…The bone is usually sewn into a piece of the bone-skin and then encased in an ornament cover of copper or brass" (Wojkowitz 1996, 398). It is interesting to note that in the research conducted by Wojkowitz, the human thighbone trumpet is mainly utilized in weathermaking operations as means to repel the malevolent beings that cause destructive storms, hail, and droughts. Also, as a repellent, the *rkang gling*

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[62] See Touranadre & Drojes's (2003; 484).

is blown to protect important clerics, such as the Dalai Lama, as they walk from place to place (Wojkowitz 1996, 537). However, in *gcod* the *rkang gling* is used to in tandem with a spoken invitation to call these same demons into the ritual area. Therefore, the functions of the *rkang gling* in Tibetan ritual praxis as a whole are directly related to mediation of the demonic, the effect of which is determined by context. With the proper location found and necessary ritual equipment obtained, *gcod* practice may ensue.

1. Gathering the Guests

The first part of the *gcod* rite departs from the typical structure of methods found in other *sgrub pa* within Tibetan praxis.[63] As already mention, *gcod* is a practice oriented towards alleviating the hunger of malevolent beings and converting them to Buddhism. Therefore, before the typical ritual procedures (refuge, inviting the field of accumulation, eight-limbed prayer, *mandala* offering, etc.) are undertaken in the *gcod* liturgy, the demon guests are invited first so that they can accrue the merit from the entire rite. Once 'converted' these beings that were previously thought of as demons become beneficial gods, a transition from '*dre* to *lha*. As a result of this mechanism, the *gcod pa* gains power and mundane assistance from these now presumably benevolent and enlightened beings. Harding (2003, 123) explains this further: "In each of those categories there are so-called gods and so-called demons. In the ultimate category, the [distinction between] god and demon is definite, whereas

[63] In Beyer's *Cult of Tara* (1978) and Snellgrove's *Hevajra Tantra* I & II, (1959) the common place of refuge at the beginning before the invitation of any guests is discussed.
[63] Harding's translation (2003) of *phung po gzan skyur gyi rnam bshad gcod kyi don gsa gyed,* a twelfth-thirteenth text that gives an essential version of the *gCod* ritual.

in the former [categories] it is not definite; a god may be a demon or a demon a god."[64] The types of demons addressed imply a unique cosmological classification within the *gcod* ritual sequence.

The first main group of demonic guests gathered are the 'devils' (*bdud*), which in *gcod* correspond to hindrances and limitations that are the result of one's own ignorance and ego-fixation, which upon transmutation become sources of wisdom and power. They are as follows:

Tibetan Name	English Name	Bad Function	Good Function
thongs bcas bdud	Material Devil	obsession with physical senses	ESP/magic
thogs med bdud	Immaterial Devil	attachment to cognition	right cognition
dga' brod bdud	Exaltation Devil	over-indulgence	freedom
byed kyi bdud	Inflation Devil	self-fixation	wisdom

The second classification scheme mentioned in the *phung po gzan skyur gyi rnam bshad gcod kyi don gsa gyed* addresses that bifurcated potential of both gods and demons oriented around certain types of cosmological manifestations; each type of god/demon has a benevolent or malevolent power that corresponds with it. The classification is as follows:

Tibetan Description	English Description	Rel. Particle + 'dre	Rel. Paticle + lha
jig rten pa' I kun btags	As designated by worldly people	aversion	attraction
ngo bor gnas tshul	By their essential mode of being	cyclic existence	non-cyclic existence
bslu med las dbang	Of inevitable karmic forces	collective karma debt	collective merit
mthar thug don	Absolute, Ultimate	lower realms	higher realms
rang bzhin skyes	The Natural, Coemergent	ignorance	wisdom
mthong snang sgro btags	Superimposed on Observable Phenomena	bad omens	miracles

The third classification scheme mentioned in the text addresses the individual subtypes of demonic beings, specifically according to their worldly manifestations; they are as follows:

Tibetan Name	English Name	Prognosis
sdang bar byed oa'I dgra	antagonizing enemies	unprovoked malice
gnod pa'I bgegs	obstructers that harm	sickness/illness
las gdon	karmic bad spirit	ignorance
lus gdon	bad spirit of body	past body-lures
gnyan sa'I gdon	spirit of haunted place	localized mischief

Hence, within the *gcod* ritual text (Hardings 2003 translation), there are classification schemes that effectively map out the animistic Tibetan world while internalizing the demonic landscape to emphasize soteriological inherency. This evidences that *gcod* is meant to primarily be a demon taming ritual; the liturgical texts, as will be discussed below, attempt to incorporate as many types of beings as possible, thus showing the rite's propensity to be used in the treatment of specific afflictions correspondingly.

While the *gcod pa* keeps a strong sense or vivid visualization of all these types of beings as immediately present, they must be persuaded to engage in the ritual in order for benefits to be obtained. In order to summon *'dre (*demon*s), bgud (*mara*;* devils*), 'byung po (*spirits*)* and other malevolent beings to the ritual they must be attracted by the noise of the *gkam gling*. First, the *gcod pa* blows once on the *gkam gling* and says some thing like "Hey! Everyone Listen!" while visualizing as many different types of beings as possible coming to attention. The colloquial nature of this invitation is intentional; the *gcod pa* wants to be as friendly and direct as possible for the reason that the types of beings addressed in *gcod* are reluctant; those experiencing lower births are easily confused and frightened Next, the thighbone trumpet is blown and "Hey! Everyone gather here!" is said while visualizing that the beings emerge from their dwellings and surround the practitioner. With the third blow of the *gkam gling*, the practitioner can say, "Gather quickly!" or visualize the beings present and

bustling about with great urgency in his or her immediate space with an air of respect and veneration. Finally, this procedure can be repeated with three utterances of the syllable *phat* instead of three blows on the thighbone.[65] [66]

2. The Performing Refuge Vows as Yum chen mo

Once the guests for the feast have been invited, the *gcod pa* leads the assembled beings in refuge vows and the inviting the field of accumulation.

> He visualizes himself at the head of a crowd of all sentient beings, all "old mothers," and he thinks of how they experience suffering' from the depths of his heart he thinks, "I pray that you preserve us from these sufferings!" He visualizes that all these beings, with himself leading them, go for refuge with devotion of body, speech, and mind, and they recite together…"Myself and all beings…" and "To the Buddha, the Law, and the highest hosts…" up to the requisite number of recitations (Beyer 1978, 436).

This procedure is directly related to the main goal of the practice: to turn *'dre* (demons) and *bdud* (devils) towards understanding the dharma.[67] There are two essential elements to the refuge rite; first, the ritualist awakens the thought of enlightenment (*bodhicitta*) while generating a visualization of Yum chen mo surrounded by the refuge array. The main function of these segments is to accumulate merit or more specifically to "accumulate one's stock of merit with one's mind dwelling in his vow, that all the virtue which one accomplishes is for the sake of gaining omniscient knowledge, that all the virtue empowered thereby is for the sake of gaining infinite bliss even in this world" (Beyer 1978, 178). In most *sadhanas* the

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[65] Savvas (1990, 108-109) notes that "An integral part of the recitation in the syllable *phat*, which is recited through [out] the ritual. The meaning of the syllable is traditionally said to be that the two letters which make up the syllable. *Pha* and *Ta* are said to represent Sutra and Tantra respectively."
[66] These exact instructions are given in Harding's (2003) translation of *phung po gzan skyur gyi rnam bshad gcod kyi don gsa gyed* while it is mentioned without a procedure everywhere else
[67] Malevolent beings; terms correspond to 'devils' and 'demons'

Three Jewels are conjured in the mind in a conventional manner, e.g. Buddha, dharma, sangha, and etc. However, in order to facilitate the conversion process, the *gcod pa* engages in a rite of identification with Yum chen mo, the Tibetan *Prajnaparamita* goddess.

In her left hand she grasps a copy of the *Heart Sutra* and in her right is a vajra scepter, which are indicative of her function within the *gcod* rite. As previously described, the utilization of the *Heart Sutra* and visualizations of the Buddha and *Prajnaparamita* goddess leading refuge vows to an assembly is a typical method for exorcism; by way of "the inclusion in *gcod* liturgies of the dharani '*om gate gate parapgate parasamgate bodhi svaha*' and the inclusion of the anthropomorphsized *Prajnaparamita*, the female deity, as ultimate *dharmakaya* in most *gcod* lineages" the talismanic utilization of a sutra and the paradigm of *gcod pa* as exorcist is epitomized (Gyatso 1982, 324).[68] This also becomes the main reason to appeal to the sentient demons one is trying to convert as well as a structure for the liturgy.[69] Furthermore, in the *gcod* instructions, as presented in the *Phung po gzan skyur gyi rnam bshad gcod,* each ritual manipulation contains two distinct layers of meaning and two means by which to accomplish the same goal corresponding to the 'logic' of the *Heart Sutra*.

The manner by which the refuge subrite is discussed in the texts mentioned here illustrates the two levels of praxis, which highlight *gcod's* intrinsic relationship to the Tibetan *anuttarayogatantras*. Going for refuge is, on one level, the reiteration of vows. However, as Snellgrove notes, "there are said to be three grades of vows

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[68] Donald Lopez (1996, 221)

[69] In Lopez's (1996, vii) translation of the Hearth Sutra it says "Empitness is not other than form; form is not other than emptiness;" the two levels of truth are derived from this paradoxical duality and are thematic within the liturgy and ritual method withn *gcod*.

(*sdom pa*), namely for a monk, for a bodhisattva and for the practitioner of 'secret mantras,' and these are though of as corresponding to the three main ways (*yana*), the Hinayana, Mahayana, and Mantrayana…Tibetans commonly refer to the two ways of the sutras and the tantras, as practicable courses" (Snellgrove 2002, 214-215). The two levels of vow taking are visible in the progression from the gross to subtle in the types of refuge visualizations listed below. The 'outer three jewels' are similar to Beyer's (1978) description except, as Yum chen mo, one visualizes an entourage of *dakinis*, bodhisattvas, *sravakas*, 'precept' lamas, and the Buddha above as the jewel of the sangha refuge array; the jewel of dharma is visualized as texts containing the *Prajnaparamita* teachings; and the visualization of oneself as Yum chen mo is the Buddha jewel. Next, the 'inner rite of refuge' entails a maintained identification of oneself as one's own *yi dam* for the Buddha jewel; the dharma jewel is this particular deities mantra; and the jewel of the sangha is the maintenance of *sramana* activity. Finally, the 'secret three jewels' of refuge are the *kleshas* as the Buddha; the sublimated *kleshas* as the dharma; and the transmuted *klesha* activity undertaken while being compassionate towards others is the sangha jewel. The *Phung po gzan skyur gyi rnam bshad gcod* continues to note that the 'suchness three jewels' are the steadfast and clear mind as the Buddha; discriminating awareness as the dharma; and the sangha is all others who possess these attributes. The final set of attributions for the objects of refuge are the 'intimate three jewels' corresponding to the lama (Buddha), the lama's instructions (dharma), and one's spiritual friends (sangha). With reference to the progression from 'outer' to 'suchness' in going for refuge, the 'creation' and 'completion' stages of Tibetan esoteric Buddhist ritual can be found in

the *gcod* ceremony. Thus, contained within the *gcod* liturgy are the means to come full circle: first the aspirant views the three jewels, presiding deities, demons, etc. as object and though ritual practice are then identified with himself or herself so that he or she is the 'Buddha, dharma, sangha, etc.'[70]

The conclusion of this portion of the *Phung po gzan skyur gyi rnam bshad gcod kyi don gsal byed gcod* rite entails 'inviting the field of accumulation.'[71] Given that *gcod* contains the essential elements of the *anuttarayogatantra* and Mahayana Buddhism, "The high point of any such rite is the descent of the actual divinity (known as wisdom being or *jnanasattva*, into the symbol of the divinity (the sacramental being or *samayasattva*), which has been prepared for this mystical conjunction" (Snellgrove 2002, 131). This is understood to be the ritual manipulation that secures the ritualist's identification with the deity: "The *samayasattva* is the initial visualization, whose force is connected with the maintenance of the vow (*samaya*) taken before the guru. The *jnanasattva* is the deity as a real aspect of Buddhahood. The *jnanasattva* is visualized as merging into the *samayasattva*, where it is 'bound' by a series of mantra syllables" (Samuel 1993, 235). This manipulation exists in *gcod* when the visualization proceeds from Yum chen mo to Ma gcig.

Ma gcig is visualized as being above the crown of one's head sitting in a cross-legged posture on a moon seat, naked, holding a *rnga chung*, *dor je*, and bell. The *gcod pa* visualizes the syllables *om ah hung* at the crown throat and heart. The glow of the *hung* at Ma gcig's heart strikes the heart of Yum chen mo, who is still present, who then reflects this light back out in multi-colored rays, which are

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[70]Described from Harding's (2003, 144-147)
[71]Described from Harding's (2003, 151-152)

dispersed to the refuge array. The *gcod pa* then recites "*om sarwa thagata sapariwara vajra dza dza om sarwa tathagata sapriwara* *argham* *(padyam; pushpe; dhupe; aloke; gandhe; newidye; shapta) pratitsaye svaha shapta ah hung svaha"* while accompanying each offering with the appropriate mudra.[72] Next, after saying *dza hum ham ho* the light merges into a *samayasattva (dam tshig pa; jnanasattva*), a being encompassing the totality of the vows made by and the wisdom of the practitioner, which is just the collective presence of the refuge array.[73] Finally, the process of the visualization of the various lights emanating from Ma gcig, through Yum chen mo, to the refuge array is reversed. As Yum chen mo absorbs the light, she creates nectar, which is visualized pouring from her toes into the ritualist. It exits the *gcod pa*'s pores as black liquid composed of his or her negative karma flowing into the earth as an offering to the karmic debtors, devils, and demons that live there in exchange for a clean moral slate. In the end, one's body is perceived to be sparkling clean and prepared for the next phase of the rite.

3. Giving Homage and Making Offerings to the Eight Branches[74]

Once refuge vows have been given to the guests the *gcod* ritual continues with a praises and offerings to the 'eight branches.' Once again, this is a merit-generating rite which entails the spoken "Om homage…." directed at each part of the refuge array and "This injunction has the power to increase the merit derived from the recitation of any verse that follows it" (Beyer 1978, 186). Before and during

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[72] See Beyer (1978) for pictures and meanings; see Snellgrove (2002) for explanation of this sequence. This looks liked butchered Sanskrit because it is transliterated Tibetan which was transliterated from Sanskrit; there is not a uniform method, thus, to deal with this Tibetan process.
[73] This is a unique variation within the *gcod* rite (Harding 2003, 311).
[74] Paraphrased from Harding's' (2003, 153-154) MCE

recitation the spoken prayer, the *gcod pa* utters *phat* and imagines that the guests are attentive and engaging in the offering and praise themselves. Holding the presence of the guests within mind, the practitioner now offers the 'five sense pleasures' in the form of *dakini* to the branches.[75] After the sense pleasures are offered in the forms of visualized goddesses, the ritualist then imagines the divinities multiplying into an array of *dakini* who are holding mirrors. The practitioner envisions these deities as being in a state of bliss that is the result of non-attachment to form, which is subsequently offered to the *bla ma* jewel, who is pleased, and in turn neutralizes the practitioners attachment to form, thus empowering the body. Next, one imagines the multiplied *dakinis* playing pleasurable music, which is also offered to the *bla ma* jewel who is pleased again, and one's speech is empowered. Subsequently, the *bla ma* is offered dharma texts and teachings, which empowers the mind with wisdom. Thus, the 'body, speech, and mind' are purified and the ritualist then absorbs the entire visualization into him or herself. This section of the ritual concludes with another '*phat*' and now that the ritualist has accrued a store of merit and is ritually purified, the main efficacious and potent sequences of the *gcod* rite can be undertaken.

4. Preparations for the Feast: The 'pho ba

In order for the *gcod* practitioner to offer his or her body to the invited guests, it is necessary to perform a 'consciousness transference ritual ('*pho ba*).' The projection of consciousness through the crown is arguably one of the essential and

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[75] Physical form: Buddha dakini goddess, sounds: vajra dakini goddess, fragrences: ratna dakin goddessi, tastes: padma dakini goddess, textures: karma dakini goddess (Harding 2003, 154)

characteristic components of the *gcod sadhana* that assumes a classical yogic physiology and ritual process, which parallels many rites in the *anuttarayogatantra.*[76] In order to describe this component in *gcod* ritual topically and thoroughly, the prerequisite "Opening the Door to the Sky" initiation (Tib. *nam mkha' sgo 'byed 'pho ba*) will be discussed first. Second, the main ritual techniques to separate consciousness from the body which are utilized in *gcod* will be described.

In most lineages, "The Opening the Door to the Sky" is the only prerequisite to engage in the *gcod sadhana*.[77] This was the key initiation that Ma gcig received from Pha dam pa Sangs rgyas (1075-1150) preceding her own elaboration on the tradition. The *phung po gzan skyur gyi rnam bshad gcod kyi don gsal byed* translated by Harding and the sources used by Edou suggest this initiation was received directly by Ma gcig from Pha dam pa. However, Savvas states that the empowerment was most likely received from sKyo ston so nam bla ma, Pha dam pa's disciple with reliance on texts Pha dam pa presumably wrote. The speculation concerning a utilization of a textual tradition *ex post facto* is supported by the proliferation of texts concerning the rite from the twelfth century onwards.[78]

Though ubiquitous, Pha dam pa's lineage of transference remained particular to *gcod* practice. The "Opening the Door to the Sky" typically refers to the 'transference of consciousness without support' while the term *'pho ba* refers to a more specific set of visualizations assuming a yogic physiology, the 'transference of

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[76] The process of generation and identification with a tantric deity [Hevajra, Vajrapani, Heruka; see Ronald Davidson (2005) and Snellgrove (1997) for description of Pala *anuttarayogatantra*].
[77] Without actually describing what they are, the sources used here, Edou (1996) and Harding (2003), mention that there are disparities with the Rnnyig ma *gcod* ritual, but there are no specific contrasts made with the explicated 'bko rgyud pa version
[78] See Davidson's *Tibetan Renaissance* (2005, 293).

consciousness with support.' According to Harding's (2003, 205) translation, both the main initiation with its obligatory cultivation of the ability to achieve transference without support and the tantric physiological method are necessary skills to be attained by the *gcod* adept: "Practice…the transference called 'Opening the Door to the Sky' with the perfectly pure view of emptiness without support, and the way to train in the rite of transference with the support of a substance. Do these three without fail twenty-one individual [sub]sessions in each of eight sessions every twenty-four-hour-period." These two methods for transference correspond to the 'generation' and 'completion' stages within the *anuttarayogatantra* already discussed.

However, upon entrance into *gcod* practice, the gross means to separate consciousness from the body, which is referred to as 'transference with support (with substance),' must be utilized. Generally, this involves a serial visualization of the *cakras*, each representing a realm of transmigration, wherein the adept draws out the energy of each, temporarily withdrawing from cyclic existence into the 'open sky.'[79] First, the practitioner visualizes a red *thig le* (Skt. *bindu*) in the left foot and white *thig le* in the right foot. Next, the *gcod pa* then visualizes black light emanating from these spheres (often this visualization is supported with a Tibetan character: *du*) towards the hell realms (Skt. *narakaloka*). As this light spreads one draws out the energy of the realm until each *thig le* becomes concentrated and bright within the feet. Next, one utters the syllable *phat* while simultaneously visualizing the *thig le* shooting up the legs, uniting in the genital are in the form of an effulgent sphere the

[79] Mentioned by Harding (2003), Edou (1996), and Savvas (1990) assertions based on the texts they translated

size of a birds egg. Once again, a yellow light is visualized as the syllable *pred* extending to and drawing back from the *preta* (hungry ghost) realm, making the *thig le* more potent. Another uttering of *phat* causes the *thig le* to propel itself to the naval wherein a green light is extended and drawn in. This continues into the heart, which emits yellow light (*nri*) to the human realm, the throat which emits red light to the asura (jealous god) realm (*a*), and the crown which emits white light to the *deva* (god) realm (*om)*[80].

After the *thig le* has gestated in the crown it becomes so potent and effulgent that with another utterance of the syllable *phat* it ejects from the body bringing one's consciousness with it into the visualized the blue black syllable *ha* a cubit above the ritualist's head.[81] The final step is to generate a visualization of oneself as a *dakini* and, once the *gcod pa*'s focus is concentrated in the syllable, he or she is able to achieve full identification with her in possession of a third-person view of his or her body, ready to be carved up and served to the guests.[82] Often it is hard to maintain this visualization; as a result, there are abbreviated versions of this ritual to be repeated throughout the *sadhana* in order to maintain the disembodiment of consciousness.

Ultimately, the utilization of support for the *'pho ba* is not necessary for those whom have reached the completion stage in *anuttarayogatantra* praxis. In the *Phung po gzan skyur gyi rnam bshad gcod kyi don gsal byed,* , Ma gcig says that

> Once you have mastered emptiness, you understand that the body is a reflection of emptiness that it is without true existence. You realize that it is untrue. Then

[80] Harding (2003, chapter 5).
[81] These instructions, excluding the syllable visualization, are mentioned by Harding (2003, 158)
[82] The psychological interpretation given by Edou (1996), Evans-Wentz (1959), Mumford (1989), and others assert that this is one's ego or conventional self

> the mind is not attached to the body and the body is not attached to the mind…In that way, being free of concepts of both attachment and nonattachment to all phenomena, such as both body and mind…is called 'the emptiness of the great conceptlessness.' It is without something to be transferred and without transference (Harding 2003, 156).

Therefore once one has achieved the tantric soteriological goal, the transference can be done without the yogic serial manipulation of the subtle body.

5. Making Requests to the Assembled Guests

At this time the ritualist is fully identified with the deity by way of the transference. This is the time when the ritualist can posit his or her own requests to be granted by the divinity whose identity she or he has now assumed. These requests should be "for the universal benefit of all beings, but in the course of the ritual there are often added as well any special requests to the deity which may have been made by the sponsor, by one of the monks, or by a member of the lay community" (Beyer 1978, 194).

6. The Offering of the Body as Mandala and Food

In order to exorcise and employ demonic beings in the *gcod* ceremony, the ritualist visualizes a self-equivalent effigy (*mi ngar; glud*), which is offered as recompense and currency to pacify negative influences and to gain their blessings. However, the body offered must be empowered and enriched for the guests, which is a direct repudiation of the blood offering given to demonic beings outside the Buddhist context. This is indicative of a polemic, resolved by lamas who find "solutions for pragmatic concerns in a manner that elevates them to subserving the dharma and the enlightenment process" by means of transmutation, which has been

discussed previously (Mumford 1989, 88).

In this vain, the *'pho ba* and the offering of the body are the essence of *gcod* rite that represent the resolution of the ethical problems surrounding the red offering, which will be described now. As previously mentioned there might be major structural diversions from the prototype of the rite discussed here. But, these two segments are universal and sequentially related to each other.[83]

Once the transference is achieved the first step towards preparing the body for the goals of the practice, the red feast, is to create a *mandala* visualization composed of it.[84] A blue *dakini* is visualized holding a corpse-cutting knife in the right hand and a trident in the left.[85] Then, the *dakini* visual is multiplied creating five knife wielding women. She then begins by stripping the skin and creating the 'golden ground.' She continues separating the supine corpse, creating a standard *mandala* that is then offered to the *yi dams*, lamas, and *dakini*s.[86] After this has been accomplished the body can fed to the rest of the guests.

For each group of guests present, the body must be prepared using different methods, which are described as follows:[87]

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[83]The texts translated by Savvas (1990), Evans-Wentz's *Tibetan Yoga*, (Oxford: 1959) , Edou (1996), Harding (2003), and Orafino (2000) and Mumford's ehtonography in *Himalyan Dialogue* (University of Wisconsin Press,1989) all evidence that these two aspects are essential and crucial in the *gcod* rite

[84] In the decentralized areas of Tibet the blood sacrifice to demons is the black offering, see Mumford (1989).

[85] Evans-Wentz (1959) describes this generally while the MCE (2003) goes into detail

[86] A *mandala* delineates a consecrated superficies and protects it from invasion by disintegrating forces symbolized in demoniacal cycles. But a *mandala* is much more than just a consecrated area that must be kept pure for ritual and liturgical ends. It is, above all, a map of the cosmos. It is the whole universe in its essential plan, in its process of emanation and of reabsorption. The universe not only in its inert spatial expanse, but as temporal revolution and both as vital process which develops from an essential Principle and rotates round a central axis, Mount Sumeru, the axis of the world on which the sky rests and which sinks its roots into the mysterious substratum (Chandra 1995; 9).

[87] According to the MCE model from Harding (2003)

Structure of the Feast Offerings

Guests	Corpse Preparation
lamas, yidams, dakinis	Flesh and bones are pulled apart in Mt. Meru sized skull cup. The five godesses of the 'sense desirables' offer it the array.
guests of karmic retribution	The corpse is imagined as a gtor ma and its parts of the body (hair, head, organs, flesh, skin, etc.) are serially transformed into treasures, sense pleasures, flowers, precious woods (as many permutations of the 'desirables as possible
beings of the six realms	Goddesses are visualized carrying skull cup containing melted down elixir from previous feast. The goddesses deliver the elixir to the beings of the six realms in turn.
local gods and klu	Brains, Spine, fat are the 'three whites;' Blood, grease, and lymph are 'three sweets;' tissue is fine clothing; heart is a wish-fulfilling gem; kidneys are precious jewels; flesh becomes grains; and bones become various animals
hostile gods and demons	Wrathful goddess prepares imagined freshly dead corpse in various ways depending on which type of demon is to be pacified.

Furthermore, each visualization sequence requires the ritualist to maintain identification with the wrathful Vajravarahi, a red *dakini* in fierce form holding a curved corpse-cutting knife and skull cup, except during the fifth feast.[88] For this latter portion of the rite, typically, in order to attract the malevolent demons, the ritualist becomes the Wrathful Black Mother, Khros ma nag mo, as means to create fear and awe among these guests.[89] Because this particular segment is the most crucial to the arguments in the main part of this work, it will be discussed in detail.

The red feast is the most potent segment in the offering of the body. In order to “gather the gods and demons, bring them under control, and overwhelm them with brilliance” the black blue *ha* is visualized as the heart of Ma gcig emanating into a

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[88] Vajravarahi is the consort of Cakrasamvara in t he Buddhist Tantras. See Snellgrove (1997, 158).
[89] Khros ma nag mo is the most wrathful *dakini* possible, corresponding to the Indian Kali, so says Gyatso (1982).

visualization of Khros ma nag mo, who is black, in charnel ground attire, and is holding in her right hand a flayed skin wet with blood and a *gkam gling* in her left (Harding 2003, 177). With a new visualized corpse while identifying with Khros ma nag mo, the ritualist imagines a demonic retinue in accompaniment whom together are imagined to make the demonic guests feel fear and awe. The body through this agency is thought to pervade a vast amount of space and is offered in the most greasy, oily, and delicious manner possible.[90] The beings present are thought to come in myriad numbers swarming about the flesh. Next, the ritualist cooks the body and steam flows up and the flesh begins to rip apart. Thus, the key offering of blood and flesh is now ready to be made. The body can be either offered to a number of general types of demons, a specific type of demon, a specific demon, or generally dedicating to specific demons, which require different visualizations for processing the body.[91] One alternative is for the ritualist to just to imagine all of the guests present plundering the body for raw flesh and blood. At the end of the visualization the guests are dismissed carrying leftovers and the visualization is dissolved with a *phat*. It is at this point the *gcod* rite can be concluded.

7. Dissolving the Visualization, the Dedication of Merit, and Identification with Avalokitesvara

As means to gain the maximum amount of merit from the rite, the *gcod pa* always dedicates the merit he has accrued to all sentient beings, which because of the selflessness and compassion inherent in the act, augments his own store of merit.

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[90] The ritualist imagines that the cooking body emits irresistibly delicious fragrances (Harding 2003, 177).

[91] See Harding (2003, 178-9).

Next, in order to dissolve the visualization of the entire array of guests hosted during the ritual, the *gcod pa* imagines light radiating from Yum chen mo's heart that strikes her entourage. After everything else is absorbed in progression towards Ma gcig, she then becomes the "essence of all the Buddha's of the three times" (Harding 2003, 182). The ritualist now utters '*phat'* and imagines light rays exuding from his heart and striking Ma gcig, who condenses into a *thig le* and then melts into his or her head. At this point, the ritualist is to identify with Avalokitesvara and recite "*om ma ni pad me hung*" as much as possible. Finally, with one more '*phat'* the guests leave.

Does Western Psychology Explain gcod ritual?

There are many technological and cosmological layers within the *gcod* rite, with varying assumptions and roles to play. In psychological discourse, however, these layers are glossed over when psychoanalytic theories are posited. The demons addressed in the ritual are understood to be one's own mental projections:

> At the core of *gcod* meditation is the recognition that the 'demons' to be severed are one's own fixations upon reified perceptions of self and phenomena as intrinsic absolute realties. This is based upon the basic Buddhist psychological premise that during the process of perceiving phenomena ordinary awareness correlates phenomena with concepts not in accord with actuality (Sheehy 2005; 38).

Sheehy continues to describe the "imaginative world of the *gcod* practitioner" where the psyche is "anthropomorphized as benevolent gods (*lha*) or malevolent devils (*'dre*)" (Sheehy 2005; 41). Hence for Sheehy and others, the primary function of *gcod* is to overcome fear in general: "To take adversity and felicity as the path of transformation (*lam du khyer*), the *gcod* practitioner enters environments that evoke terror and anxiety in order to solicit the deepest recesses of fear;" and the practice of

gcod is essentially "cutting the deeply imbedded notions of 'other' at the core of conscious awareness" (Sheehy 2005; 42, 46). Therefore, it is the opinion of these writers that *gcod* is psychotherapy; a means to feel better about oneself to promote psychological health. Unfortunately there are a number of problems with this type of interpretation of *gcod*.

Primarily of note is the fact that, within the premodern Tibetan context for the majority of Tibetans, the alleviation of anxiety through a symbolic process was not a likely motivation for ritual patronage and praxis. As established in chapters two and four, Tibetans assumed a worldview where there was no question as to the ontological status of demons; their existence was taken for granted. In addition, anxiety was the least important prompt for a *gcod* ritual: *gcod* ritual was used to protect the deceased in funerary rites, appease gods and demons to protect crops from hail and cause rain, pacify a demon agentive in possession, and to pacify the demonic causes for physical illnesses and disease. As chapter four elaborates on, the *gcod pa* was a professional in a ritual marketplace who could mediate the demonic, and as a result, solve a host of problems. For this reason *gcod* survived and perpetuated itself, not because it made people feel better about themselves. The goal here, thus, is to isolate how *gcod* was understood and what is meant for the Tibetans themselves without relying on discursive theoretical speculation.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

My discussing religion in terms of its popular development has sought to elevate the vilified subjects of demonology, exorcism, and local religion as they pertain to the study of Tibet. The majority of orientalist scholars who have studied these subjects verified their superiority and authenticated their fears by seeing Tibet as a land of paganism and animism. As a result of contemporary revulsion to this, the most intense, potent, and fear-provoking areas in the study of Tibet are ignored. Donald Lopez (1996, 236) shares this view: "there seems something unseemly about returning to materials the study of which is so closely associated in our minds with an ethnocentric analysis of Tibetan culture that was so openly motivated by the wish to justify and promote the colonial order." Interestingly, such reservations only reestablish this order by separating out insensible, superstitious, imminent, and ground-level aspects of Tibetan religion:

> It would seem to be the task of the current generation of scholars, then, to challenge the characterization of Tibetan Buddhism that has so long tainted their field of study—not by defensively concerning themselves exclusively with those texts and practices and persons who most easily fit into our conceptions of what is legitimately 'philosophy' or 'religion' (a fit achieved only through the most violent decontextualization), but by attempting to move beyond an ethnography in which "aversion serves to transform behavior and material substances into the objects of representation and interpretation (Lopez 1996, 236).

In response to Lopez's challenge this project has discussed the 'wild' side of *gcod*, but has sought to elevate it out of the denigration and devilization imbedded in the orientalist roots of Tibetan studies. As a result of this, several areas of discourse have

been revealed for Religious Studies and Tibetology.

The study of the ritual genre in classical Tibetan literature can elucidate several important aspects of Tibetan religion. First, an examination of the genre can provide information about popular religion. The evidence presented in this paper shows that the orientations of the Tibetan *mi chos* resemble those of Chinese popular religion, for example in funerary and exorcism rites. However, the full arsenal of Tibetan ritual mediation in these areas remains unstudied. The best sources available are Wojkowitz's (1996) *Oracles and Demons* and Beyer's (1978) *Cult of Tara*, but these lack academic methodologies, are ambivalent towards Tibetan culture and not focused on texts. Teiser (1988) illustrates the potential for this approach in *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China*. In it he fully describes a popular ritual in terms of its textual tradition, mythological narrative, cosmology, history, and sociology. By studying Tibet in this fashion, a great deal can be learned about the beliefs and experiences of Tibetans throughout their known history.

Not only does an examination of textual traditions provide new avenues for academic methodology, but can provide more data on Tibetan religion itself. The presentation of *gcod* in the main text utilized here, the *Phung po gzan skyur gyi rnam bshad gcod kyi don gsal byed,* is more devoted to Ma gcig's hagiography,her lineage narrative, Tibetan cosmology, and Buddhist eschatology than it is to the *gcod* ritual proper. As opposed to philosophical texts that are studied and debated in the monastic colleges by the Tibetan elite, ritual texts contain information disseminated to the masses. The reason for this is, as Teiser demonstrates in his work, ritual activity represents the main nexus between the institutional and diffuse, especially in

premodern East Asia. An entire hierarchy of ritual specialists mediates between the Tibetan people and the threat of the demonic, which illustrates that the majority of overall Tibetan ritual is actively dedicated towards popular concerns. The potential for understanding the religious behaviors and activities of the dynamic Tibetan people is immeasurable:

> It is in this sense that the study of Tibetan ritual might allow us to break down the opposition that we imagine to exist between thought and action, which makes it difficult for us to think that Bu ston also did choreography, and dKon mchog 'jigs dbang also made pills, that Tsong kha pa wrote so profoundly on the role of reason while experiencing visions of Manjushri, that the Nobel laureate does not make a major decision without asking a semi wrathful deity to take possession of an oracle (Lopez 1996; 236).

The greatest barrier to the study of Tibetan ritual, in this sense, is that it connects with the actions and behavior of people, which must be investigated.

As a result of this, religious studies must develop methodologies for gathering information in the field. "Religious studies has yet to develop a style of field study. It is only beginning to consider fieldwork an important task…We do not lack ritual manuals or ethnographies of rituals. Rather, we lack an integrated field of ritual studies" (Grimes 1995; 5). In other words, the domain of fieldwork in religious studies is exclusive to the study of ritual. Unfortunately, this is the most difficult aspect of religious praxis to study, especially in Tibet, because of remoteness and the 'inside' access to culture it requires. There is an inherent need for ritual studies in Tibetology; it is entering a critical period to study the remnants of its premodern culture in the field and, unfortunately, the most pioneering ethnographies have been the most racist. As Grimes points out, the key is to apply a secular and academic study of ritual in the domain of Tibetology; these means are the only way to

contemporarily, accurately, and objectively get at this vital organ of Tibetan civilization. Taking these considerations in mind this project exemplifies the nascence of *gcod* studies and has shown the potential for its development.

This project, rather than positing a teleology for *gcod*, has raised a number of essential questions that must be explored in order to more clearly understand the tradition. The first is a sociological question that ritual studies can answer: who was the *gcod pa*? The *gcod pa* is mentioned in the sources for this project as a distinct type of religious professional. For example, in Harding's (2003, 210) translation of the *Phung po gzan skyur gyi rnam bshad gcod kyi don gsal byed,* an entire section of the text is devoted to the *gcod* practitioner's proscribed appearance:

> Yeshe Rangnang, your woolen cloak is very attractive. But the wild sheep's prong is unfit to keep, so get rid of it. In my system, any object that could harm others, no matter what it is, defiantly goes against the doctrine of the Buddha. So all deadly accessories are objects to be abandoned. Since this beggar women's tradition is that of the *yogin*, it is good to change into red and yellow colored hats and clothes that are consistent teachings, but it is also fine not to change. Wearing styles of light felt, matted felt, woven wool, or cotton cloaks, wearing felt boots on the feet, and carrying cow-horn begging bowls is [consistent with] my dharma system.

This description verifies there was distinctiveness to the *gcod pa*s and that they could be separated out as a distinct group. What are the histories and status of the *gcod pa*s in the premodern Tibetan scene? The unquestionable presence of exorcism ritual components in *gcod* furthers the question of a hierarchy among these practitioners who became adept enough at the ritual to utilize it professionally. An even larger question concerning the *gcod pa* is how established *bla mas* came to have mastery of the ritual. Does this represent an institutionalization of the practice or is this characteristic of a *bla ma* on the local level indiscriminately fulfilling a variety of

ritual functions? Furthermore, important to this endeavor is narrowing the definition of the *gcod pa* as to isolate it to those who perform a common ritual. By isolating the prevalent ritual among a specific group, the question as to what Tibetan popular concerns specifically are can be investigated. This exploration into the *gcod pa* character can be accomplished both by the study of existent *gcod* practitioners and the study of popular ritual texts.

The question of the distinctiveness of the *gcod pa* raises another issue as to what he or she is distinct towards. This study indicates that Tibetan religion on the ground was pluralistic and different people subscribed to different religious beliefs on two levels. First, a similar cosmology may be assumed in the singular worship of one among many deities with distinct attributes and functions; there were immense numbers of spiritual beings in the Tibetan landscape. On the other level, a choice among the varied ritual cosmologies and techniques to approach these gods and demons in endeavors of placation, domination, or submission must be made. If this is the case, then ritual specialists competed for the performance of the same types of services. *Gcod* certainly entails a distinct ritual process and delineates a broad soteriological and cosmological system and, as a result, is it apart of a larger marketplace of ritual activity where specialists from different ritual systems compete for patronage, allowing them to perpetuate themselves and delineate their tradition? The answer to this question can yield important insight into the manner of diffusion of Buddhism proper and indigenous religious traditions throughout history in Tibet.

Furthermore, if it is the case the *gcod* was an instrumental ritual used in a competitive domain, the question of its technological development is begged. As this

study has show, the *gcod* ritual presented in the *Phung po gzan skyur gyi rnam bshad gcod kyi don gsal byed* can be broken down into distinct components that have their basis in separate lines of technological influence. Does this mean that parts of the ritual existed independently in certain contexts? Surely, the refuge rites, the Eight Limbed Prayer, and the dedication of merit are distinct segments, but have they ever been removed so that the *'pho ba* and feast offerings were practiced more expediently and more often? Are their other soteriological backdrops to perform the same ritual process? Overall, these questions indicate a great deal of the history of Tibetan religion has yet to be considered.

Finally, because *gcod* is a ritual technology understood to have distinct this-worldly effects as well a means to attain tantric ends, there is entire field of *gcod* (and Tibetan ritual) phenomenology remaining to be explored. In the *Phung po gzan skyur gyi rnam bshad gcod kyi don gsal byed* there is a section dedicated to the 'evidence of success', which is filled with experiential phenomena that accompany the practice of *gcod*. For example,

> Purification of obscurations [has occurred when] you wash everything on the body that could be washed, all stains are purified, and the body becomes white and shiny. Inside, all impurities are purged down and out, and your insides are left clean and shiny like a fish's belly. Every single thing inside you is thrown up, and your insides become empty and shiny like a bag of skin. In between, a black sludge like liquid soot from the channels exudes from under your nails and pores, and all the channels become shiny clear like a blown-up balloon (Harding 2003 225).

These types of phenomenological "signs" are not just unique to *gcod* but Tibetan religion itself. In the past the *samadhi* and *siddhi* of the tantric or esoteric practitioner of Buddhism have been poorly studied by psychologists. However, an explanation of the phenomenology of *gcod* contextualized within its ritual practice can bring the

methods and theory of the academic study of religion to bear on it.

The ritual of *gcod* shows that Tibet was an autonomous agent in the construction of its culture and identity. At the heart of this identity is a densely inhabited spiritual world that the Tibetans have informed their soteriology, ritual and cosmology with throughout the premodern period. *Gcod* demonstrates that mastery in the field of ritual is intrinsic to the perpetuation and diffusion of culture and institutions. As a result, further study of *gcod* and other ritual mediations in the *mi chos* will reveal a greater Tibetan identity that is more prevalent and diffuse than the clerical literate culture currently privileged in Western scholarship.

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